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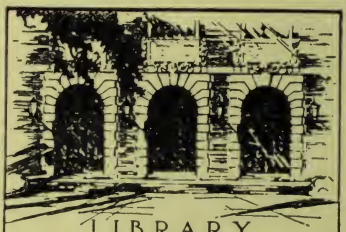

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MR. SPIVEY'S CLERK.

A Novel.

BY

J. S. FLETCHER,

AUTHOR OF "THE WINDING WAY," "ANDREWLINA," "ACROSS THE BREAKERS," "OLD LATTIMER'S LEGACY," "FRANK CARISBROKE'S STRATAGEM," ETC.

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MR. SPIVEY'S CLERK.

CHAPTER I.

AN EVENING WALK.

ABOUT half-way down Paternoster Row there was, not many years ago, a small shop, which bore above its window the name of Spivey, Publisher and Bookseller, and was not otherwise distinguished from the adjacent establishments. What its number was has now slipped from my memory; nay, I do not remember that in the time of my acquaintance with it it ever had a number. The letters which were delivered there never bore a number; and the booksellers' collectors, who came to the place with blue or black bags across their shoulders, never knew

it by any other term than "Spivey's." Not that Spivey's possessed any features likely to attract. I believe, speaking from memory, that it was a very dirty shop as regards its exterior appearance. The door and window-frames had grown dingy from much rubbing. The Row is exceedingly narrow just there, and the top half of the large sheets of glass had evidently not seen the charwoman's mop or leather for some years. The lower half was painted with white lead, so that no one might peer into the shop, lest they should catch glimpses of the mysteries of the publishing craft. But Mr. Spivey's various office-boys had thought it well to have an occasional peep into the Row, and they had therefore scratched minute portions of the paint away, so that the painted half bore something of a piebald appearance. There was generally a contents bill hanging in the square of glass which ornamented the top panel of the door; but the latter was always so dingy that I question

whether any one could read it. Nevertheless, as Mr. Spivey published a magazine and also a weekly paper, it was necessary that a contents bill should be displayed somewhere about the establishment, and accordingly the magazine bill was posted in the door, and the weekly paper in the window. The titles of both magazine and journal were painted in neat black letters on the door-post, but I am not going to tell you what they were just now.

It was seven o'clock in the evening of a warm June day, and things in the Row were beginning to get quiet. The great vans which so effectually block that tiny thoroughfare were gone; the itinerant vendors of fruit and ice-cream had betaken themselves to likelier places; and there was a steady procession of men in top-hats towards Ludgate Hill. The Row, in fact, was going home to Kensington and Camberwell, to Highbury and Brixton, to Shepherd's Bush and eke to Bow; to dinner with plenty of wine, and

a box at the Opera; to tea with a penn'orth of shrimps, and a look in at the tuppeny seats of the Britt. or the Vic. For in the Row there are mingled all sorts and conditions, from the aristocratic publisher who gives splendid dinners to his more famous authors, to the office-boy whose circle is that of Kingsland Road or Blackfriars.

They had not yet closed, however, at Spivey's. Mr. Spivey himself had certainly gone home to Sydenham at five o'clock, carrying with him a bit of fish in a straw bag, and a pine-apple in a paper bag. It was a habit of his to go home early, perhaps because it seemed the correct thing to do, or possibly because he found seven hours' attendance at his establishment quite enough for his constitution. Mr. Spivey's clerks, however, were expected to remain in evidence until seven o'clock. When the clock of St. Paul's struck seven the office-boy was at liberty to sweep up; at a quarter-past the whole staff was equally at

liberty to depart. Mr. Spivey thought that his clerks ought to be grateful to him for granting them such early hours, and he never lost an opportunity of impressing upon them the advantages which they might gain during the hours intervening between seven and bedtime.

Let us enter Mr. Spivey's establishment and look round. It is somewhat dingy inside as well as outside, and the place smells as if the gas had been burning all day long, as indeed it usually is. There is a long counter running the length of the shop; there are rows upon rows of square pigeon-holes filled with books; and there is a glass screen at the end of the counter, with a door in the middle on which is inscribed the word "Office." Close to the window looking into the street there is a small desk, protected from the vulgar gaze by a wood screen, and on the screen, and immediately facing you as you enter the shop, is a placard drawing attention to the fact that payments will only be made on the second

Saturday in each month, a most disturbing announcement to any who want their money badly and come three weeks too early for it. Mr. Spivey's clerks are preparing to go home. The office-boy, whose jacket is so much too small for him that it seems to have grown with him, has sprinkled the floor with water and is now sweeping up. A young gentleman of twenty is performing the duties of his toilet at a small square of looking-glass. He has taken off and hung up a very dirty turn-down collar, a decayed vest, and an out-at-elbows jacket, and is now donning a very high collar, a brilliant tie, and an irreproachable vest and coat. A bottle of boot-polish at his elbow gives evidence that he has not forgotten his pointed shoes, while his shining top-hat is standing ready to be adjusted upon his well-ordered head. Near him a middle-aged individual is putting on his coat with a preoccupied air, which simply means that he is endeavouring to decide at which

of the neighbouring public-houses he will take a glass of bitter. And at the small desk near the window stands a young man, who is casting up figures in a ledger and comparing them with a pile of coins at his side, being, in fact, occupied in making up his petty cash for the day. The carefully-attired young gentleman, having finished his toilet to his own satisfaction, adjusts the curly-brimmed hat, and, with a "Good-night, old man," to the figure at the desk, goes out. The middle-aged man follows him more slowly and says, "Good-night, old fellow," too. And then the office-boy, having struggled bravely with the brush and swept the last vestige of dust into the street, comes up and says, meekly:

"I've swept up now, Mr. Christmas."

The young man at the desk nods, says, "All right, James, you can go," and is at once left alone, the boy producing his cap from some invisible quarter and vanishing through the door like a shadow.

Let us look at Mr. Thomas Christmas, head clerk to Mr. Spivey the publisher, as he stands at his desk adding up pounds, shillings, and pence. He is rather above the average height; he is not good-looking; he is badly-dressed. Beginning at his boots, you will notice that they are patched in more than one place, that his trousers are very much bagged at the knees and white at the seams, that his vest is also the worse for wear, and his coat old-fashioned and shiny. Nevertheless there is nothing untidy about him. His clothes are darned here and there, but they are not torn; his boots are patched, but the soles are thick and the heels are not down. His linen is clean and good, his black tie is new, and he wears an old-fashioned hair-chain to his watch. In spite of his well-worn clothes and unfashionable appearance he looks what he is—a gentleman. Certainly, it is not handsome looks which bestow the stamp of gentility upon him, for he is not handsome. His

hair is suspiciously auburn, his nose is a snub, his moustache slight and sandy, his cheeks are much freckled, and his ears, like his hands, are large and red. But his eyes are soft and gentle and kindly, and there are lines about his mouth which mean, properly read, that Thomas Christmas is patient and forbearing and just.

The clock of St. Paul's chimed a quarter-past seven, and Mr. Christmas, having found his petty cash correct, put away his books in the safe in Mr. Spivey's office, and transferred the keys to his own pocket. This done, he took down his hat from its peg, and, having brushed it, put it on, and, giving a careful look round to see that all was right, went out of the shop and locked the door. He was evidently not in any great hurry to get home, for he strolled gently Citywards, and often stopped to look in the shop-windows in Cheapside. Any one bestowing careful notice upon him, would have perceived

that Mr. Christmas generally chose the jewellers' shops as his objects of admiration.

He had nearly reached the Mansion House, when he saw a young lady advancing towards him, at sight of whom he quickened his own pace. She came up to him with a smile, and gave him her hand; and then they turned, and went westward with the rest of the crowd.

"You are ten minutes earlier to-night, Maggie," said Mr. Christmas, when they reached the comparative quietude of St. Paul's Churchyard, and were able to hear each other speak. "I thought I should be too soon, and I was too late."

"Oh!" said the girl, "I was so glad, Tom, to get away. It has been so hot to-day. I was nearly stifled. Let us go somewhere where we can get a breath of fresh air — if there is any fresh air in London."

"You have had tea, Maggie?"

"Yes, Tom. Tea, and bread and butter, and some cherries. And you?"

"I have had tea, Maggie, long since. And, now, where shall we go?"

"Let us go along the Embankment, and past the Abbey, Tom; and along Parliament Street, and the Strand, and then home."

They crossed Ludgate Hill — crowded with cabs and omnibuses—and turned aside into the Broadway, and thus reached the Embankment. And there, with one consent, they both leaned over the parapet, and looked down at the river.

"Oh," said the girl, "if it was only the sea!"

She was a pretty girl, with brown eyes and hair, and a confiding expression about her which made her seem as if she were perpetually endeavouring to win every one's heart. Not a strong or very healthy maiden by any means. The round cheeks were pale, and had more of the lily than the rose. A countryman, remembering the damask cheeks of his daughters, would

have said that the girl wanted fresh air, and plenty of it. And that was just what she did want, and just what she could not get. For milliners' assistants in London do not get much time for country junketings; and Maggie Primrose was a milliner's assistant.

"If it was only the sea!" she repeated, longingly, looking at the muddy river. "I wonder when I shall see the sea again, Tom."

"Before the summer is over, my dear, I hope," said Tom Christmas. "We will have a day somewhere, Maggie."

Maggie's face grew brighter.

"Won't that be splendid?" she said, delightedly. "But, oh, not Margate or Ramsgate, Tom, please! One does not get clear of London at either place. I wish we could find a nice quiet place where there would be just the sea, and the sky, and some old fishermen, and a ruined tower, and ourselves."

You see, the weary, dreary City life had not

crushed all the imagination out of this young lady. What the things she mentioned suggested to her I cannot tell you; probably she thought of absolute rest, which some people call Heaven and others Death.

"Listen, Maggie," said Tom Christmas. "I have been thinking lately that we might manage something more than a trip this year. I shall have my holidays soon, and so will you. What do you think if we all go to the seaside, or into the country, for a week — a whole week? Would you like it?"

"Like it! Oh, Tom — why it almost takes my breath away to even think about it! Oh, how splendid it would be! Should we all go— your mother, and Julia, and you, Tom, and I?"

"All, Maggie. I think we shall manage it. I have got a little work in hand which will bring ten or twelve pounds in; and that would be enough for a week. But don't say anything at home, my dear, until the thing is certain."

"No, Tom. Oh, I wish I could do something towards it. I wish I could earn a few pounds extra."

"My dear, I don't. I am sorry that you have to work at all. Some day, Maggie, you shall do nothing and live in a beautiful little house, and have a servant-maid, and read all the new books —those, I mean, which are worth reading—and you shall have a real silk dress. I think you would like all that, Maggie, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, Tom. And I should like to know that you were not obliged to work so hard, and that you could buy all the books and things you would like, and have a new coat whenever you wanted it."

"Is that a hint, Maggie? I do want a new coat now, I believe. Let me see—is it three, or four, or five years since I had a new coat. Alas! it must be six. Never mind. Somehow, I don't think I should be very comfortable in new garments; the old are so much easier."

"Aren't you going to smoke, Tom?"

He pulled out an old briar pipe, which had evidently seen much service, and produced an equally ancient tobacco-pouch. He filled the pipe carefully, taking care not to spill any of the precious weed. When the pipe was lighted he gave his arm to the girl and they walked on, evidently quite content with themselves and the world. And yet they were very poor, these two, and had small prospect and little chance of ever being anything else. For Tom Christmas, only son of a poor country parson, had a mother and a sister to support out of the very small salary he received at Spivey's, and it was only by doing a little extra work in the evenings that he managed to keep his head above water. As for Maggie Primrose, she was, as I have already told you, a milliner's assistant, and received the magnificent remuneration of thirty pounds a year, out of which sum she had to provide herself with board and lodging and clothes.

"Have you been busy to-day, Tom?" she asked as they paced leisurely along the Embankment. "Is Mr. Spivey still coining money, and has he promised to raise your salary?"

"Spivey, my dear, is a second Midas. Whatever he touches turns to gold. It is really wonderful, how fortunate he is. He hadn't much when I first went to him, Maggie, and now he lives in a big house and has half-a-dozen servants and wears a diamond ring. But for all that, my dear, Spivey is not a gentleman, and never will be."

Maggie nodded her pretty head. Her own ideas as to what constituted a gentleman were not very clear, but she had implicit faith in Tom Christmas.

"Poor Spivey!" said Tom, blowing a huge cloud of smoke at the imperturbable Needle. "He tries very hard to ape the manners of his betters. I believe he was a street urchin in the beginning. But that's in his favour. I applaud

Spivey for that. Where his caddishness comes in is in his being ashamed of his humble parentage, and in the tremendous airs he gives himself. I shall never forget Spivey and his wine. You remember, Maggie, when he asked Denton and Jones and me down to supper with him? Spivey brought out some claret and began praising it, telling us how much it cost him a dozen, and swelling out before us with all the magnificence of an Alderman. And, oh, Lord! the stuff was corked, and that badly, and poor Spivey didn't know what was the matter with it."

He took the pipe out of his mouth and laughed heartily at the remembrance of Mr. Spivey's corked claret. Maggie laughed too, though she was probably no wiser than the unfortunate publisher.

"But it's too bad to laugh at poor Spivey," said Tom. "He's got plenty of good points about him. I wish, though, he wouldn't give

himself such airs. Fellows who drop their h's and occasionally say 'was you' shouldn't give themselves airs. And, oh, Maggie, Spivey got such a snub to-day. You know Bumpo, the great 'special,' the fellow who writes those grand accounts of royal funerals, and weddings, and assassinations, and so on, in *The Daily Telephone?* Well, Spivey wanted Bumpo to write him a page for *Sparks* every week, and he wrote to Bumpo and said that it had occurred to him (things always *are* 'occurring' to Spivey, somehow), that a page from Bumpo's pen would prove an interesting feature in his paper, and he had therefore very great pleasure in offering him a guinea a page for his contribution. Bumpo wrote back and said that as he always endeavoured to pay the butcher and the baker and the candlestickmaker he must decline Mr. Spivey's magnificent offer. Oh, Lord! you should have seen Spivey's face when I gave him the letter. Why, Bumpo gets *ten* guineas

a page from *The Sketcher*. But that's Spivey all over. He wants as much as possible for as little as possible."

I don't think Tom Christmas was actuated by any malevolent feeling in telling his sweetheart these anecdotes of his employer. But he knew that he was a gentleman by birth and education, and that Spivey was a little cad, who possessed neither the one nor the other; and it sometimes galled him, patient as he was, to know that he was bound to serve his inferior. Moreover, he regarded Maggie as his *alter ego*, and only talked of Spivey to her. To his mother and sister, Spivey was, according to Tom, a very nice man, perhaps not quite a gentleman, but very nearly so.

The two went on, stopping awhile to gaze at the Houses of Parliament, contemplating which, Maggie said that she felt sure Tom ought to be a Member, and perhaps he would be one day. Whereupon Tom said that when he took

his seat in St. Stephen's, he would bring in a Bill to give everybody a salary large enough for their needs, with a special provision for holidays.

"I used to think once, Maggie," he said, as they stood at Poets' Corner, and remembered the names of those who lay inside, "that I should be a great author, and be buried here. I used to write poetry. Fancy me a poet! A red-haired poet! Love-verses they were, too, some of them. Fancy a red-haired poet writing love-verses! You might as well imagine a donkey posing as a war-horse or an elephant."

"And what have you done with them, Tom —the verses, I mean? You might have shown them to me."

"My dear, I don't want to make an ass of myself in your dear eyes. Perhaps once upon a time I might have shown them to you. I am afraid they are burnt now, Maggie."

"I am sure they would be beautiful, Tom."

She had so much implicit faith in him, that she believed him capable of any great deed; and if he had claimed the honours of a great poet, she would have accorded them to him without demur.

"I believe I thought so, too, at one time," said Tom; "but when I came across some of them the other day, they seemed awful rubbish, Maggie, awful rubbish."

She shook her head at that, doubting if anything that Tom did could be done badly, and said that she felt sure Tom was a great poet, whose light was hidden under a bushel, but who would eventually startle the world, and finally be buried in Poets' Corner. And with that she gave his arm a little squeeze, and they both laughed and turned away, and went up Parliament Street into the Strand, which was busy, and gay, and full of light. And there, like one Traddles and his sweetheart, they began to look in all the shop-windows, and tell each

other what they would buy when they were rich. And while Tom desired nothing but books and scientific instruments, Maggie's tastes ran, as was perfectly natural, in the way of diamond rings and silk dresses.

It was half-past ten o'clock when they reached the High Street in Islington, and said good-night to each other. Both had had a hard day, and had added to their labours the further exertion of a long walk, and yet neither felt tired, so exhilarating is love. Maggie Primrose, however, went to bed immediately after leaving her lover, and dreamed, perhaps, of all the happiness that the future was to bring. As for Tom Christmas, he sat up until the clocks chimed two in the morning, working, as usual, for those whom he loved. I have no doubt that his poor head ached and his eyes burned before he finished his appointed task. What of that? *Laborare est orare.*

CHAPTER II.

MR. SPIVEY'S ESTABLISHMENT.

I SHALL not soon forget the day whereon I first came to London, like a stray beam drifted into some stupendous whirlpool, to take up a position in the office of Mr. Spivey, publisher, of Paternoster Row. I was just twenty, an orphan with strong inclinations towards literature as a profession, and eager to get to London, which was, I fancied, the only place where an author should live. I believe that I cared very little what position I secured, so long as it was in the metropolis. Perhaps I should have drawn the line at butchering or baking, but I had certainly had no objection to serving Mr. Spivey. Mr. Spivey wanted a clerk who could do some-

thing more than cast up accounts and write dictated letters. My qualifications pleased him; he engaged me. It was not at a great salary. Men of the Spivey persuasion never do pay great salaries. Their method is to secure the largest amount of work at the smallest possible cost, and it matters little to them that the necessary balance is paid out of human flesh and blood.

And yet to look at him, or to hear him speak to strangers or great people, you would not have thought Mr. Spivey a hard man. He was only middle-aged; he had made his way in the world; he was a member of two learned societies, and an extensive dissenting community reckoned him as one of its shining lights. Nay, he was accustomed to preach now and then in the chapels of this community, and he was perpetually holding himself up to us, his clerks, as a model Christian man, repeating daily, with much unctuousness, certain texts which seemed to fit his case, and might possibly some day

fit ours. He was always attired in sober black, and wore the nattiest of turn-down collars, and black ties, so that no one could possibly mistake him for other than a deacon of the church. He affected the company of his society's ministers, and was never so much pleased as when a dean or a minor canon of the Establishment visited his shop with a view to purchasing certain publications. Nay, sound and somewhat aggressive Protestant as he was, Mr. Spivey was even delighted if the shovel hat and round collar of a Papist priest became visible in his little shop.

I suppose that most of us are somewhat better off in our old age than we were in our youth, at least, as regards worldly position. The man who was born heir to an earldom should, if he plays his cards well, die possessor of a ducal coronet. Tom Scales, the rich grocer's son, should, with like good management, blossom into Sir Thomas Scales, Knt., head of a county family. It is a sad result if a man goes out

of the world as poor as he came into it, though it is indeed quite certain that none of us, by a strange irony of fate, can carry even a half-penny away with us. Mr. Spivey, who sprang from very humble beginnings, was evidently impressed early in life with the necessity of climbing the social ladder. What he did in extreme youth, or where he acquired his limited education, I cannot say, but he was very shaky about aspirates, and in moments of excitement or forgetfulness would plough through the grammatical rules with unbounded license. I fancy Spivey had tried more trades than one in his time; but he certainly hit the nail on the head when he decided to become a Father of the Row. How he got to London from his native Yorkshire, none of us ever knew; but it was currently reported in the office that when he first arrived in town, bent upon making his fortune, he possessed as capital the insignificant sum of one hundred pounds. We used to wonder

how he had managed to build up his business on so small an amount, and admired his pluck as much as we laughed at his peculiarities.

It was, perhaps, fortunate that Mr. Spivey's affairs prospered, for down at Sydenham he had a colony of little Spiveys, whose feet must have worn out a tremendous lot of shoes, and whose mouths must have taken a great deal of filling. I think there were six young Spiveys when I first knew the family, and a new one used to arrive every year. These young olive-branches, of course, necessitated a small army of nurses and servants, and I used to wonder whenever I went down to Spivey's private establishment, wherever the master of the house used to creep when he wanted to be quiet. But, in course of time, Spivey built himself a mansion, a thing of many gables, and turrets, and lancet windows, and hideous stained glass, and, I suppose, he devised a prison for the children somewhere about it.

It was not of course to be supposed that a man who had a large business and a larger family could manage both without some slight diversion. Nothing, according to the doctors, is so bad as keeping your attention fixed on one thing, and Spivey believed this to the letter. I think it was about the second year of my stay with him that he began to frequent certain cafés and restaurants where certain literary persons most do congregate and discuss professional matters over a glass. I dare say Spivey told his wife—if he ever did tell her anything about it—that the exigencies of business required his attendance at the Gaiety and the Criterion bars. Literary men, of course, are fond of whisky-and-water and tobacco smoke, and though Spivey hated both, and was always deadly ill after being in company with either, he displayed a brave spirit and courted the Muses' devotees with an ardour quite praiseworthy. Not that Spivey ever succeeded, in my time at least, in catching any one

of note. Great authors, nowadays at any rate, do not flock together in public haunts in order to smoke bad cigars and drink fiery spirits, and though Spivey was always bringing some "distinguished writer" to the office, his swan invariably turned out a goose, and a thin one. He was always electrifying us with the news that he had made the acquaintance of Mr. So-and-so, the great author, who was about to call and arrange for the supply of a great novel or a grand poem. When Mr. So-and-so turned up, he generally proved to be down-at-heel and out-at-elbow, while his aptitude for borrowing half-crowns or getting advances was truly wonderful. I think that literary men who were in comfortable positions used to palm their poorer brethren off on Spivey, in order to rid themselves of him. They knew that Spivey paid poorly and expected a great deal.

And yet, in spite of his meanness, and his silliness, and his foolish endeavours to penetrate

into the society of men who would never have condescended to talk with him for five minutes, Spivey got on and made money, and became fat, and comfortable, and rich. And the way in which he did it was very simple. The books that he published cost him practically nothing, for authorship at any rate. They were all certain to sell. Nothing that was not cheap or popular ever went out of Spivey's shop. Books, he used to say oracularly, the public will have—not, perhaps, as they will have sugar or bacon, but still in fair quantities, and he who can meet the demand *cheap* must needs succeed. And Spivey's books sold, though no author ever profited by them. Famous novels, the copyright of which had expired, issued from Spivey's doors at fabulously low prices, and were eagerly bought. French novels, too, he published; and paid a poor governess or despairing hack ten pounds for translating. Anything salable, which involved no more cost than printing and bind-

ing, Spivey took up with alacrity. If he ever did employ an author, that author had to write a great deal for a very little. Then, too, Spivey had a magazine. A wonderful magazine, too. It was a class magazine. When its proprietor began business, he looked round him and saw a certain profession which needed a journal and had none. Spivey saw his chance and seized it. He founded a periodical for the use of that profession, and made it so useful to that profession, that every member of it subscribed. Spivey's journal attained an enormous circulation. Imitations sprung up, of course; but it was recognised as *The Organ.* Its advertisement columns were always full, and its editorials regarded as oracular utterances. And when it was at the very height of its prosperity, Mr. Spivey sold it to a Limited Liability Company for twenty thousand pounds.

Mr. Spivey also possessed a weekly paper. It was one of those journals which seem charac-

teristic of the present age, when no one is happy unless there is a *cause célèbre* in the Divorce Court. Its name was *Sparks*, and the famous literary man-of-all-work, C. Portsmouth McFlynn (author of numberless works in fiction, history, theology, and the drama), was the editor. A wonderful fellow, McFlynn, and never at a loss. To see him throw off a dashing description of a fight between the Brixton Chicken and the Putney Pet, and then turn to a new sheet and commence an essay on the "Brutality of the Age," was something to be admired. His copy for *Sparks* was always ready, although it usually had to be dashed off at the last moment.

"Ah, me bhoy, Oi'm late agin this blessed afthernoon! Give me some peepor, me bhoy, and a pincil, and Oi'll knock off the shtuff in foive minutes, so Oi will."

I used to keep all the old scraps of letter-paper for McFlynn's use. A more careless, untidy man in preparing his "shtuff," never existed.

"Did you ever, by any possible chance, buy any scribbling paper of your own, McFlynn?" I asked him once.

He threw back his head and laughed, as only impudent, handsome Irishmen can laugh.

"Faith, me bhoy," he said. "Oi've been a journalist this twenty year, and niver did Oi boy peepor, or pin, or pincil in me loife."

Where McFlynn got all his information from regarding the doings of high life I have often wondered; but *Sparks* was always so full of chit-chat about Lord This and Lady That, that some of us used to associate its editor with the cream of Society.

"He must be a big swell," said Jones, who was our office swell, "or else how could he know all about the great people's doings?"

Certainly, if ever there was a divorce in the air, McFlynn knew all about it, and would hint of it in carefully considered and suggestive paragraphs in *Sparks*. I think he must have

been in the confidence of a good many gentlemen and ladies of the kitchen, judging from the unheroic figures some of our supposed nobility used to cut in his paragraphs. Valets and ladies' maids have, we know, a nasty habit of peeping through keyholes and listening at doors. It only needed men of the McFlynn stamp to turn these "maynials" into first-class journalists.

Mr. McFlynn, besides editing *Sparks*, was engaged in much other literary work, and only attended in Mr. Spivey's office for an hour or two daily. But we were not without company; for besides Tom Christmas and myself, there was Mr. Jones, who dressed exceedingly well, and had duly qualified as what people now call a "masher," and what was then known as a "toff," and Mr. Denton, who was a somewhat dreamy, poetically-inclined individual, working on a very small salary; and Mr. Rattler, the traveller and advertisement agent, who was a very lively fellow, and kept us all going after Spivey had

gone home at five o'clock. We used to look forward to Rattler's appearance from a journey, for he would then relate to us all the news of the road, and recount each and every new story and joke which had recently come to his notice. We had also two office-boys, one of whom was perpetually asleep like Pickwick's fat boy, and the other kept in a state of feverish anxiety lest the evening's parcels should be late at Hayden's or Billing's.

On the whole we had very good times at Spivey's. Spivey himself, with all his snobbishness and meanness, was not a bad master. Sometimes, when we had been working extra hard, he would give us each half-a-sovereign, and tell us to go and "henjoy" ourselves for the afternoon. Whenever we worked after seven o'clock, he allowed us sixpence each for tea—which, when one comes to think of it, was extremely handsome conduct. Mr. Rattler, to be sure, never would stop later than half-past five

o'clock; but then he had a wife waiting tea for him, and scorned our bachelor festivities. Mr. Jones used to observe that sixpence meant three glasses of bitter beer and pocketed the coin, and Mr. Denton used similarly to mention that it meant two goes of Irish whisky, and both worked on while Tom Christmas and myself drank our tea and ate our tea-cake.

Looking back on those days, I believe that I have never since lived such a regular, monotonous life, as during the few years I spent at Spivey's. I used to arrive at the office at half-past nine o'clock; I went out to dinner at one; I went out again to tea at five; I went home at seven. I had a table of my own in a quiet corner, and there I used to sit for hours at a stretch correcting proofs—oh, horrible and dreary task, which I now hate like poison!—or writing letters, or scribbling copy for Mr. McFlynn. Every afternoon I used to visit the printers, where there was more

proof-reading, and consultations with the printer's foreman about blocks and plates and what not. Now and then, I used to have to hunt up McFlynn, whom I should probably find at the "Cock," or the "Cheshire Cheese," talking politics with a compatriot, and perfectly oblivious of the fact that it was Thursday afternoon, and within two hours of *Sparks* going to press. When I did so find him, I was bound to treat him to a brandy-and-soda before he would consent to accompany me. Once at the office he would sit down at my table, borrow "pincil an' peepor," and fling off paragraphs about the Royal Family, My Lord Broadacres, the Terrible Scandal in High Life, and the —— Club Incident, as fast as I could catch and sort them.

The first year that I spent at Spivey's, Tom Christmas and I used to be a great deal together. We were both the sons of clergymen; we had each certain tastes in common; we were

both very poor. At first, London being a veritable gold mine to me, he took me round to see the sights, and under his guidance I made acquaintance with all that was worth seeing in town. That was in summer, when the evenings were long. In winter, we used to go to the Guildhall Library and read, and I am quite sure that I have never read so much since as I did then. I believe we used to look forward to the winter evenings. We always sat at the same table, the last one on the left hand side as you enter, and we generally stayed there from half-past seven until ten o'clock, at which hour we used to go home, talking on the way of what we had read. I used to read little else than poetry in those days, and some fine verse I first made acquaintance with in that fine old City Library. There I first read William Morris's "Defence of Guenevere" and his "Earthly Paradise;" there I read Swinburne's earlier volumes; there I disinterred many a thin

octavo, which had not seen the light for many a year. But Tom Christmas, across the table, used to read books whose very appearance used to discomfit me—Kant, Hegel, Spinoza, and Comte. And he read them carefully and thoroughly, and carried away the pith of them in a bulky note-book. He used to listen patiently to my views on everything, and never contradicted any of my wild and immature statements or assertions; but he taught me much in a quiet, unobtrusive way. In those days I used to write verses, and eventually spoke of them to him. Then I found that he, too, had once flirted with the Muses, though I never saw the result of the flirtation. For life, eminently prosaic, had knocked the poetry out of Tom Christmas's brain, and left there something more tangible, if less real.

It was in early spring when I first went to Spivey's. I remember the day well enough. How is it that one remembers some days so

clearly, and others not at all? Every minute of that day is photographed on my mind, for it was the day when I went to London for the first time. Think of that, ye country swains and maidens, who have never yet seen the great metropolis, and are ardently desirous of doing so. It was afternoon when I reached London—an afternoon in April. The hedges and trees in my native northern county were bare and brown, but the hedges and trees of Middlesex were fair and green. As we approached the great city, its vastness impressed me to the last degree. Houses, houses, houses on every side, and houses, I knew, for many a mile beyond. Once outside the station objects of interest began to appear to me, who had studied my map of London thoroughly. Gray's Inn Road, the old houses in Holborn, Chancery Lane, Fleet Street, Temple Bar, the busy Strand, all these places seemed like old friends, met in strange places, so familiar was I with their

names if not with their faces. From my hotel I made my way, never once asking a direction, to Paternoster Row. Spivey had gone home. I went away, too, and wandered round Ludgate Circus to the Embankment, where I stood and admired, fairly enchanted by the great buildings of the world's centre, as the setting sun cast his last rays upon them. I wandered into Westminster Abbey, and nearly wept over the tombs in Poets' Corner, going afterwards into Palace Yard, and watching the Members pass into the House. Knowing no one and having none to speak to, I wandered up and down the Strand that night until it was almost next morning, intoxicated with the sensation of novelty, and by the crowds, and gas-glare, and thousand-and-one strange sights. I have often wished that I could go to London for the first time again.

I remained in the quiet hotel, to which domestic authority had consigned me, for a few

days, during which I tried to find suitable lodgings. One whole day, at Spivey's direction, I devoted to wandering up and down London, endeavouring to come across such accommodation as would fit my limited purse. But I had to present myself in the Row again next morning and confess that I had seen plenty of landladies, but none likely to suit me. And I looked at Spivey wistfully, I have no doubt, hoping, though it was no business of his, that he would descend from his pedestal and find me a place where I could lay my head in peace. Spivey was always particular that his assistants should be lodged in sober "Christian" families. He rang his bell, and summoned Tom Christmas.

"Christmas, Mr. Tempest wants to find lodgings. In a good, respectable, Christian family, Christmas. Do you know of anything?"

Tom Christmas looked at me and I looked at him. Speculation was in his eyes; hope and entreaty in mine. I think he meant his eyes to

say: "What sort of fellow are you?" I am sure that I meant mine to say: "Help me if you can." We had seen each other for a few minutes on the previous day and I think had been favourably impressed each by the other.

"I am afraid I don't," said Tom Christmas, upon which my hopes fell. "But I will see what I can do," he added, upon which they again rose higher than ever.

"Very good, Christmas," said Mr. Spivey. "I shall be glad if you will. A sober, respectable family, Christmas, mind. Where there are all the spiritual advantages to be had. Family prayer, of course. Also no late hours."

I thought I discerned just the least sparkle in Tom Christmas's patient eyes. He looked at me again.

"I was just thinking," he said, "that there is a room to spare in my own house if Mr. Tempest would like to take it."

"Oh!" I cried, "I should be delighted."

"But, of course," added Tom, "I must consult my mother and sister, who live with me."

"Certainly," said Mr. Spivey, "certainly. Very kind of you, Christmas. Your mother and sister, I think, are members of the Church?"

Tom Christmas bowed.

"And you—er, you are attached to some body, eh?"

To this question Tom Christmas made no direct answer, but I am sure that his face flushed a little, as though he resented these searching questions. He turned to me.

"If you would like to go home with me this evening," he said, kindly, "I will introduce you to my mother, and we will see what arrangements can be made."

I hastened to thank him, and Mr. Spivey, forgetting his anxiety about family prayer and the spiritual privileges, thanked him too, and told me that I ought to feel much obliged to Mr. Christmas, which I certainly did.

I went home with Tom Christmas that night. It was seven o'clock when we left the office, and he led the way into Aldersgate Street, where he looked dubiously at the trams and 'buses.

"We will ride, if you like, Tempest," he said, looking at me. "I generally walk. Salaries at Spivey's hardly allow one to spend twopence on a tram."

I hastened to say that I should really prefer to walk and we set out, Tom Christmas talking to me all the way in a kindly fashion. I am sure he had no desire to draw me out; but before we reached the "Angel" at Islington I had told him all about myself, my hopes, and my aspirations. And to everything I said he listened kindly and patiently, impressing me more by this than I had ever been impressed before.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHRISTMAS FAMILY.

THE house to which Tom Christmas conducted me was one of many similar mansions in Canonbury Square, big, gloomy, and in no wise conducive to good spirits. The square itself looked fairly pleasant in the evening light, for the trees in its midst had just put on a new coat of green, and the meagre flower-beds were gay with the glory of crocus and snowdrop. But in the windows of the houses, which might have been equally bright with flowers, there was nothing more attractive than dingy blinds and doubtful lace curtains. I had come from a part of the country where the inhabitants are very particular about their windows, and the dinginess

of the London windows made itself very apparent to me.

The Christmas mansion, however, which was in the furthest corner of the square, and almost under the shadow of Canonbury Tower, which is famous for something or other—I have forgotten what now, but I believe there is something about Oliver Cromwell or Oliver Goldsmith or both in it—was conspicuous from its neighbours by reason of very white blinds, bright door-knob, and clean doorstep. One glance at it was enough to show you that some one lived there who was scrupulously clean and neat. I felt it almost an act of sacrilege to step on the white threshold, and nearly shuddered as Tom Christmas laid hold of the highly-polished brass knocker. Admitted by a very small servant-maid, who was so clean that you could see yourself reflected on her well-soaped forehead, and who wore a large white apron and a huge white mob-cap, we found ourselves in a fairly wide hall, smelling

much more sweetly and soap-and-waterish than most metropolitan halls do. Tom ushered me into a room on the right, and left me to amuse myself there while he went to find his mother and sister and inform them of my presence.

The room, a large, square apartment with a window commanding a view of the square, was just as neat as the outside of the house. Every chair seemed to be in its place, and each had a white antimacassar on its back; a mahogany table in the middle of the floor was arranged in stiff, formal fashion with books in ornamental bindings; a mahogany bookcase fitted the wall opposite the window; a few oil-paintings hung here and there, relieved at intervals by heavily-framed steel-plates; a group of wax-flowers under a glass shade stood on the mantelpiece, flanked on each side by two heavy bronze candlesticks. I looked in vain for anything bright.

The bookcase naturally attracted my attention first. It had glass doors, which are abominable

things, and one had to hold one's head very much on one side in endeavouring to look round the divisions at the titles. When the titles of the books were seen they were not reassuring. Theological, all of them, and of that dismal type which was so prevalent a hundred years ago: "Sermons," by the Rev. Timothy Stamper, A.M.; "Discourses," by the Rev. Prudence Wellbeloved, B.D.; "A Voice from the Pit," by Master Barnabas Tinkler, Minister of the Gospel, at Little Bullocksmithy in Hampshire; "Experience of Humphrey Cartwright, the Converted Play-actor," by himself, and so on. I turned from the bookcase with a dreary feeling.

The books lying on the table were somewhat more attractive in appearance, and I went over and looked at them. Alas, they were all of the same class as their less showy brethren, their superior binding evidently arising from the fact that they were presentation copies or *éditions de luxe*. "Memorials of a Consecrated

Life: being the Autobiography of Emma Jane Piper;" "Ease in Zion: Discourses for the King's Children;" "Sammy Smith, the Village Class-Leader: or, Holiness in Homespun;" "Father Vincent: the Story of a Pervert," by the late Emma Jane Piper; "Consecrated Learning: Memorials of the late Zephaniah Adolphus Spiffinwell, A.M.," by his father, Dr. Benjamin Spiffinwell, editor of the "Anti-Jesuit and True Gospel Monthly." I looked in vain for novel or poem; everything was sad, gloomy, foolish. Stay, in one corner of the table lay Young's "Night Thoughts," with an inscription on the blank fly-leaf: "Julia Christmas, from her Christian friend, Emma Jane Piper. Remember when you retire each night that you may be dead ere morning!"

I put the book down in disgust. I was young then and not over careful about anything; but the cold, dreary, gloomy spirit of these books oppressed me and made me feel rebellious.

Looking back now, and that with more experience and riper knowledge, I do not wonder that Miss Julia Christmas's books did repel me. God forbid that I should ever sneer at religion, or shock the pious feelings of good people! But cant is not religion and hypocrisy is damnable anywhere, and the eyes of the Great Master, which looked kindly and mercifully on the harlot, were filled with scorn and anger as they fell on the smooth brow of the Pharisee.

The pictures on the walls were not much behind the books in the race for gloom and dreariness. They seemed chiefly to consist of portraits of ecclesiastics. Just where the light could fall full upon it hung a steel engraving of the Last Judgment, full of gruesome details and writhing bodies.

I was standing in front of this production when Tom Christmas came back. He blushed slightly as he saw how I was engaged.

"I am afraid you have thought me long?"

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he said, "and I fear there is little in this room to attract you."

I hastened to assure him that I was quite comfortable. I wasn't; but what of that?

"I don't often come into this room," he said, in a low voice, as if he had no wish that any one else should hear him. "The books and things here are not quite in my line, you know. I have a little place upstairs which I will show you after tea. Will you come, Tempest?"

He led me through the hall to a smaller and less funereal-looking room where a tea-table was spread. On the threshold he stopped me and whispered in my ear.

"My sister," he said, "is rather strict and Puritanical. Please bear with her, to oblige me."

I nodded in the same confidential manner. I would have borne with all the Puritans that ever lived to oblige him, whom I had only known for two days, and had already learned to love and esteem.

We entered. The room, smaller, brighter than the other, was occupied by two ladies, both of whom rose at my entrance. The elder, who had been sitting in an easy-chair by the fireside, was a tall, gray-haired woman of sixty or sixty-five, with a huge cap, a prominent nose, and very long thin fingers which she was always clasping and unclasping. Her attire was somewhat juvenile, and she had a full set of very white false teeth which she constantly displayed in conversation. The younger lady, standing by the tea-table, was a rather tall female of thirty-five. Her dark hair, drawn tightly back from her forehead after the fashion of children's dolls, was gathered up in a severe-looking knot at the back of her head. Her mouth was straight, thin-lipped, and rigid. She wore *pince-nez*, and had a habit of looking over them at any one which was sometimes very disconcerting. Her gown was cut in the plainest fashion and a semi-clerical looking collar was all that relieved its sombre

blackness. Somehow I felt that Miss Julia Christmas was one to be reckoned with.

I shook hands with both ladies and we sat down to the little table, Miss Christmas presiding at the tray while her mother folded her silk-mittened hands beneath the table.

"Sugar and milk?" asked Miss Christmas, in a voice so deep and magisterial that it would have well-befitted any one forced to ask for poison or dagger.

I hastened to inform her that I had a deep-rooted antipathy to sugar, and never by any possible chance took it in anything.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Christmas, smiling expansively on all of us. "That reminds me of the Larkinses. You remember the Larkinses, Julia? Sophonisba Larkins and you were great friends, and it was old Squire Larkins who gave your papa his first living. At least it was the old Squire who went up to see the Prime Minister or the Queen or the Archbishop, because

he told us so himself when he came back, and brought Miss Larkins a silver-gray *moire-antique* with the loveliest trimming that you could possibly imagine, though indeed I don't think it was quite so nice as some trimming that my great-aunt Slummins had from Fillimers at Exeter—that shop, you know, Julia, on the right hand side of the way as you go down from the little church on the——"

"Thomas," said Miss Christmas, "grace!"

Why she addressed her brother in particular I don't know, but she immediately bent her head and recited a long grace with much unction. Keeping one eye open, I noticed that Mrs. Christmas had screwed her eyes up tightly and dutifully, and that Tom was steadily staring at a picture on the opposite wall. I concluded then that Thomas and Julia Christmas did not think alike. I had barely got through my first cup of tea, when Miss Christmas opened the subject of my going to reside there. Tom had

evidently broached the matter to his family circle while I waited in the front room.

"My brother tells me that you wish to find a lodging, Mr. Tempest," she said, with a keen glance at me. "We have a very good room here which we have sometimes let; but we are very particular about those to whom we let it."

I bowed, and said nothing, being, indeed, at a loss for words wherewith to reply.

"We like our lodger to be steady, sober, and a joined believer, Mr. Tempest. I hope you are a joined believer?"

I looked across at Tom Christmas. A joined believer! What was a joined believer?

"I mean," said Miss Christmas, before Tom could speak, "that I hope you are a member of the Church."

"I go to church," I said, "and I think I can satisfy you on the grounds of sobriety and steadiness."

"We could not possibly take any one who was not a member of the Church," she said. "Full Christian privileges are to be had in this house, Mr. Tempest."

"My dear Julia," said Tom, "Mr. Tempest may not feel that interest in these matters which you feel."

She took no notice of his remark, and continued addressing herself to me.

"I suppose you will attend church regularly," she said. "I should strongly advise you to sit under the Rev. Mr. Dumbury, a most excellent man, and so very faithful."

I thanked her, and said that I would remember her advice when I next went to church.

"What church have you previously attended?" she asked next.

"The little village church of which my father was vicar," I answered.

"What were your father's views? Was he faithful? I hope he was faithful."

"I should imagine he was," I said, "every one loved him."

"Was he Evangelical?"

"I don't know," I answered. "But he had a very nice service. There were candles and flowers on the altar, and incense sometimes, and——"

I stopped, for Miss Christmas sat bolt upright with a horror-stricken air, and gazed at me as if I had strayed from the pit of Tophet.

"A Jesuit in disguise!" she exclaimed. "Oh, my dear young friend, I hope you are not infatuated by the rags of Popery. Alas, how dreadfully this plague is spreading in England. And the poor man, your father, is dead?"

"He died ten years ago, ma'am."

"Ah, then he could not have had much opportunity of instilling those poisonous doctrines into your mind. I will lend you my dear friend Emma Jane Piper's 'Remarks on Ritualism.'

They will convince you of your error. Dear me! Did your father use to worship images in a dark room?"

"I don't think so."

"You would be almost too young to know. And did he hear confessions, and wear a hair shirt?"

"I don't know, ma'am. He used to give away a great deal of money to the poor, and helped everybody who needed help."

"Ah, those are but works. Works are unprofitable. It is only faith which saves. Well, Mr. Tempest, I hope you will learn much. You shall read my deceased friend Emma Jane Piper's 'Snatched from the Fire,' a story of how a young man was converted from Popery to the truth, and became a faithful minister of the Jedediah Bungleton Society."

"Will you come upstairs to my room, Tempest?" said Tom Christmas, breaking in upon this highly interesting conversation. "I dare say

my sister will see us later, so that we can arrange about your coming here."

I was only too glad to follow him. To tell the truth I was getting afraid of Miss Christmas. She seemed so terribly in earnest, and spoke so fiercely, that I almost imagined her to be some terrible Inquisitor, bent on getting all my secrets out of my breast.

Tom Christmas led the way upstairs, proceeding right to the top of the house and finally opening the door of what was, I suppose, an attic. He ushered me in, and, closing the door behind us, glanced at me in rather a shame-faced manner.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said. And then we both looked at each other and laughed, and understood things so clearly that there was no need of further explanation.

"You see," he said, pointing me to a chair, "Julia is quite an—well, let us say enthusiast—on these matters, and I am not. I believe I

could put my creed in a nutshell; but Julia's is a long and dismal one. I don't know exactly where she got it, for my father, Calvinist though he was, was a good, kindly man as ever lived. I think it must be Dumbury's influence. A most awful fellow, that Dumbury. Sighs and groans over me every time we meet, as though I were some awful profligate. However, Julia is a good girl when you come to know her, and one of the best housekeepers living. Do you smoke, Tempest?"

I had just commenced smoking at that time, so we lighted our pipes and puffed away contentedly.

Tom's attic—for it was an attic, and looked out upon the roof—was rather a nice place, in spite of its lofty position. It contained a desk, and two chairs, and some book-shelves, the contents of which were vastly different to those books in the heavy glass-fronted abomination downstairs.

"I think we could make you comfortable here, Tempest," said Tom Christmas, after a pause. "I should be very glad, too, of your company. This house is too large for us, and we have generally let one bedroom—the one underneath us—to somebody. Generally the somebody has been a parson—of the 'faithful' type, of course. I am rather tired of parsons. Once a very reverend and grave gentleman came and took the room, and stayed with us two months, chiming in with Julia in everything, and quite winning her admiration. Lord! you should have seen him going to church with her on Sundays, or have heard him and Dumbury and Julia talking after service! And oh! how he could read family prayers, and pray, too, out of his own head. Dumbury said, one day, that he had never known a man who enjoyed so much 'liberty in prayer' as this fellow did. And, Tempest, when he left he took a most affecting farewell of all of us, and, at the very door, begged my

poor sister to accept a free pass to the Royal Pumpadelphian Music Hall, where he was a well-known comic singer. Oh! if you could but have seen her face!"

"Of course she didn't accept the pass?"

"I don't remember about that; but I met the fellow a few weeks after and blew him up for his imposition. 'Dear boy,' said he, 'that's all right. Don't you remember the apostolic injunction to be all things to all men? I saw what your worthy sister was and I humoured her. Gad! it was amusing, too, to hear her and the parson going on about the wickedness of the stage, and me sitting by all the time.' Poor Julia! she means well, Tempest."

"I am sure of it," I said, warmly. And then we began to talk about Spivey's and my own prospects.

"I have been at Spivey's six years," said Tom Christmas, "six years last February. Dear me! how time flies. I don't seem much better off than

I was then, either. It's hard work getting on at Spivey's, Tempest; but, then, it's hard work getting on anywhere, and I'm thankful I've got a permanency."

"How did you get to Spivey's place?" I asked him.

"How? I'll tell you, though it's a poor story, I'm afraid. You see, Tempest, my father died when I was just twenty, and left us with nothing but this house. He had only a poor living, and had saved nothing. It was necessary that I should do something, for my mother and sister depended upon me. I was at Oxford then."

He stopped, and looked round dreamily, and following his eyes I saw them rest at last on a cricket bat, reposing in one corner of his attic beneath a faded dark-blue cap and jacket.

"Yes," he said, seeing me look at these objects, "I was in the Eleven at Oxford, and the 'Varsity Match was the last one I ever played

in, for my father died the next day, suddenly, and I had no more time for cricket."

He pulled down an old *Cricket Annual* from the topmost shelf, and showed me the score of the match in question with much pride.

"It is hard work, Tempest, finding some occupation that will put even bread and cheese in your mouth. I was literally obliged to find work quickly, for we had nothing to live upon. I wished to sell this house, but my mother and sister thought it would be a wiser plan to come here and live in it. It would have sold for a good price; but we have lived here rent free, and sometimes, you know, it would have been very difficult for me to raise the rent. It has been all that I could do, so far, to keep things going."

"But I suppose your sister is engaged in some work?" I said.

"Oh, Julia works very hard indeed. She sees to the housekeeping, and she assists Mr.

Dumbury in his parish; but, of course, that does not bring anything in."

"Of course not."

"We were here six months, Tempest, before I found any work. My mother had a little money, and we managed to subsist on it until I secured a post. I tried nearly everything. I tried agencies and agents, answered and inserted advertisements, and tramped many a weary mile. And yet nothing ever turned up, and I used to go home every evening sick at heart and weary. At length I determined to take any post that would put a pound a week into my empty pockets. The house was our own, and nothing could turn us out of it; but we must have something to eat. I went down to the City again, and began to call on the publishers, trusting that one or other of them would think me likely to be useful. At last I came to Mr. Spivey. It was at the end of a dreary day in February, and I had called at

so many places and received so many rebuffs, that I was well-nigh worn out. You know Spivey, Tempest, you know his quick, abrupt manner, his way of going straight to the point. He heard my story, looked me over at a glance, and seemed to finish his calculations respecting me in a second. 'You're an Oxford man,' said he; 'you haven't a degree; you're poor; you want work. Well, you'll find it very hard to get any.' I assured him that I was so well aware of that fact, that I could not possibly hope to add to my knowledge of it. 'Well,' says he, in that pertinent fashion of his, 'what can you do? What about languages? Latin and Greek? All very well for lawyers, doctors, and parsons, but little use in my trade. French? That's better. German? Better still. Come, now, here's a French letter and here a German one. Just translate them, will you?' I wrote out a hurried translation for him, and then added that I could also write short-hand pretty well.

'That's the best thing I've heard yet,' he said. Then he asked me what salary I wanted. I said I must leave that in his hands. 'Come here at nine o'clock to-morrow morning,' he said, 'and I'll tell you what I'll do then.' The next morning I went, and Mr. Spivey engaged me as his principal clerk—up to that time he had only had an office-boy—at the magnificent salary of one guinea per week."

"A guinea?"

"A guinea, Tempest. Lord, man, I have been there six years and my salary now is but fifty shillings a week! When I first went to Spivey he was doing hardly any business; now, he has a good business. I have seen it rise tremendously, and Spivey has made money. He ought to pay me five pounds a week at least; but he won't, and I'm too much afraid of being without a situation to throw it up."

We went downstairs after that, and there had a short conversation with Miss Christmas, the

result of which was that I settled to come and live with them from the next day forward.

I then rose to say good-night; but Miss Christmas, who was holding a large quarto of "Devotions" in her hand, remarked that it was time for the evening exercises, and she would be glad if I would join them. I was so completely under her power that I should have consented, had not Tom Christmas reminded his sister that the tram passed through the Square in three minutes and hurried me off, Miss Christmas observing pointedly that a time would come when we should all have to find leisure for death. With which very pleasant truism ringing in my ears I said good-night and went away, the warm grasp of Tom's hand dwelling with me until I got back to my hotel.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRIMROSE OF ISLINGTON.

In spite of Miss Julia Christmas's persistent attempts to supervise my religious and moral welfare, I managed to be very comfortable while residing under her brother's roof. I think that the knowledge that it was her brother's roof made me summon up courage to resist Miss Julia's influence. Quiet and unassuming as he was, Tom Christmas had yet plenty of decision about him, and though he would listen patiently to all that his over-zealous sister had to say, he never allowed himself to be influenced by her. And though I, at first, used to wait upon Miss Julia's words with fear and trembling, and even accompanied her on more than one

occasion to the church in which she sat under the faithful Mr. Dumbury, I gradually drew courage to myself from Tom, and began to make myself quite at home.

Tom and I, indeed, became like two brothers. He cleared out a corner of his attic study for me, and we bought a second-hand desk and set it up therein, and there we used to read and write of an evening after coming home from a day's hard work at Spivey's. There, too, we used to sit and talk when all else were sleeping, discussing schemes whereby we could raise or supplement our incomes, for we were both ardently desirous of becoming rich men. There was small chance of our ever acquiring fortunes in the service of Mr. Spivey, though indeed that gentleman was rapidly making one himself, and whenever we got a chance of earning a few extra sovereigns we were glad to take it.

As for Tom Christmas, it was indeed quite necessary that he should add something to the

fifty shillings which he received weekly from Mr. Spivey. His mother and sister were absolutely dependent upon him. There was no rent to pay for the house, to be sure, but everything else, taxes, rates, bread, coals, and candles, had to be provided out of Tom's slender salary —yea, and clothes also. When there is no rent to pay, fifty shillings per week is certainly enough for a family of three, though strict economy will have to be practised and a rigid supervision exercised in dealing with butcher and grocer. I had not been long at Christmas's, however, before I found that Mrs. and Miss Christmas were not the most economical people in the world. Of course it was not to be wondered at. People who have never had to earn their own bread, who have never known what it is to earn a meal before eating it, knowing that unless it was earned there would be no meal, are not the people for economy. Miss Christmas was a good manager and a model housekeeper in the way

of cleanliness and order; but her economy was of that sort which the proverb calls "penny wise and pound foolish." Mrs. and Miss Christmas were aware that things were not so well with them as in the days of the Devonshire rectory and promptly paid tithes; and, therefore, Miss Christmas decided that less butter must be used in the kitchen, and not more than one pound of tea bought per week. But Miss Christmas had always been accustomed to subscribing a guinea to the Tract Society, and half-a-guinea to the Married Missionaries, and two guineas to the Society for converting Irish Papists; and under no circumstances whatever could she dream of discontinuing these annual absurdities. And so the housekeeping money used to go, and poor Tom knew that it went, and said nothing, for he could not bear, as he once said to me, to think that his sister should be deprived of her little pleasures.

People who only knew Tom Christmas very slightly must have thought him the most mean

and miserly hunks that ever lived. I never knew him to spend a penny without taking it out of his pocket and looking dubiously at it for a long time. He would tramp through a shower of rain rather than spend twopence on a 'bus or tram. He would never have a drink with any one, because it would have necessitated his inviting the other party to drink at his expense. He would never go anywhere or do anything that cost money. He would sometimes explain this to those for whose opinion he cared, telling them that it was so awfully hard to keep going in London that he was literally forced to be a screw. But there were times when Tom's pocket opened like magic, and when even shillings came from it as carelessly as though he owned the purse of Fortunatus. Such were the occasions when he carried home a bottle or two of good old port for his mother, or when his sister had expressed a desire to read and possess the Life and Letters of some divine or female celebrated for sanctification

and faithfulness—or, as the book generally proved, for peevish selfishness and a general aptitude for making everybody else miserable.

And yet Tom Christmas, though he had a tremendous love of books, never seemed to see that it would have been quite as just for him to have treated himself to a volume or two at a second-hand stall as to spend seven-and-sixpence on some fad of Miss Julia's. This habit of self-abnegation was the radical defect in his character. Self-knowledge and self-control he had in plenty; but his self-reverence was conspicuously absent in that he never understood how good it is for a man to be just to himself before he is generous to others. Selfishness, like Miss Julia Christmas's, is well-nigh invincible; but I think even she would have melted if she had sometimes seen Tom gazing wistfully at some battered and tattered old volume in the twopenny boxes of Booksellers' Row.

"Why don't you buy it then?" I used to say,

when he was turning over the leaves of some "find" or other, to be had at some such sum as sixpence or a shilling. "It's very cheap."

"Ah, but, you see, it's this way. If I once give way, Leonard, I shall never, never recover my self-command. I can look at things now, and think I should like to possess them, and still never entertain a thought of buying them. Sixpence is a very small amount—I say, fancy Spivey hesitating over a sixpence!—and I can afford to spend one sixpence. But if I bought this book I should want to buy another next week. And I made a rule, Len, six years ago, of a very stringent nature, and I mean to stick to it."

"And what was it, Tom? Though, of course, I can guess it. It was that you would never, by any possible chance, give yourself a bit of pleasure."

"No—hardly that. No pleasure? Why, my dear man, I have a lot of pleasure. Is it not pleasure to walk and talk with you?"

"I am glad, very glad, if it is, Tom. But——"

"Indeed, when one comes to think of it, I have plenty of pleasure. I feel pleased when I come strolling through this musty little street and look at all the old books. I feel pleased when we walk along the busy Strand and see all the people hurrying this way and that. I feel pleased when we've had a good day at Spivey's, and that gentleman has gone home with visions of untold wealth floating in his brain. I feel pleased when I see McFlynn getting his 'shtuff' ready in good time."

"Poor pleasures, and all cheaply acquired."

"Nay, Len, there you are wrong. Not poor, and not to be despised because they cost nothing. Indeed, I think the highest pleasure is that which springs from one's self and not from the outside."

"You are getting too deep for me now, Tom," I answered. "But confess, wouldn't you like to go up to Lord's and see the University

Cricket Match, which you can easily do by expending, say, half-a-crown?"

"I should, Len. But think—that half-a-crown would buy ever so many loaves of bread. I believe it would even purchase a very small shoulder of mutton. It would provide me with two dinners—mutton tenpence, potatoes a penny, bread a penny, and pudding threepence, which is one-and-three altogether. I should like the cricket match, Len, but I should want my money back when it was over. I suppose circumstances have made me selfish and money-grubbing."

"Selfish you are not, Tom," I said. "Few men are less so."

"I don't know," he answered. "I am afraid we men are desperately selfish. If we talk about Heaven it's because we're thinking of going there; if we fear Hell it's because we're afraid for ourselves. Always self, always self! There are very few people who ever lose themselves, Len."

And yet I think Tom did his best to lose himself in work for others. He was upstairs in his study as soon as tea was over, sweating away at some extra work so that the water-rate collector should not have to inform us that he really would not call again, or the gas-bill man throw out nasty hints about proceedings and "summingses." Sometimes he had to put on an extra spurt so that Miss Julia could have a new gown or a new bonnet, though I will do that lady the justice to say that she was very careful of her clothes and never indulged in splendid attire. Tom, however, never by any possible chance bought a new suit for himself. He explained to me one day that he had possessed a fair stock of clothing at the time of his father's death, and that he meant to wear it up. The consequence was that he was rather out-of-date in appearance, and would often have looked the better for a new pair of trousers.

"I wonder," he said one morning, as we were

walking to the office, and had just admired the superlative cut of a City man's coat, "I wonder when I shall buy another coat. I think my black one will last another five years."

"I will tell you when you'll buy one, Tom. When you fall in love."

"In love? I fall in love? Man alive, do I look the sort of party to fall in love, or, rather, do you think anybody would ever fall in love with me?"

"I don't see why not. And as for you, Tom, why, there is no man living more likely to fall in love badly."

He looked at me wonderingly, and almost stopped his hurried walk.

"And why, Len?"

"Because you have a great reverence for women; because you would deify the woman you select; and because you have got the domestic capacity — the capacity of making everybody happy. But it will be better for

you, Tom Christmas, if you never do fall in love."

"And why, youthful philosopher?"

"Because, whatever you do, you do in earnest. You will think too much of the woman you fall in love with, and will look upon her as spirit, whereas she will be but flesh. Wherefore trouble would come upon you, and, maybe, worse."

"A Daniel come to judgment!" he said, and laughed. "Now, do you know, Len, I once was in love and that badly. Yes—and she was a very nice girl, too. A nice, plump, jolly girl. It was when I was at Oxford. As for the girl, she was a barmaid. I think it was the inimitable way in which she used to fill glasses of ale that attracted so many of us to her feet—metaphorically, of course. I wrote a poem about her in which there were several classical allusions. She was Hebe, and I and my graceless companions were the Gods, and the bar-parlour was Olympus, and the bitter

beer was nectar. But then nectar was never half so nice as bitter beer."

I had been at Mr. Spivey's establishment about twelve months when that good and worthy gentleman took it into his head to introduce a change in the arrangements of his counting-house. Some philanthropist—a lady, I suppose—had induced him to attend a series of meetings held for the purpose of promoting the employment of young women in offices and shops—of course, at longer hours and lower wages than are usually arranged for with young men. Wherefore Mr. Spivey decided to employ a couple of female clerks, and dismiss Messrs. Denton and Jones, the one of whom was too fond of his glass and the other of his mirror to do any good. That is to say, they were both too fond of the glass, but old Denton's glass went to his mouth, while Jones's only reflected its owner's countenance and collar.

Mr. Spivey at that time used to consult Tom

Christmas and me about everything. Tom, indeed, had been his familiar spirit for many a year, and nothing had ever been done at Spivey's without his advice. But they had dragged me into their counsels within the first six months of my arrival, I suppose because I was a sober, steady little party with an old-fashioned air and somewhat strait-laced ideas. When the girl-clerk question came up we were duly called into our employer's sanctum.

"I am thinking," said Mr. Spivey, magisterially, "of employing female labour."

He spoke as if the world was a convict-prison, full of women, and he the Grand Bashaw, at whose nod everybody must obey.

"What do *you* think, Mr. Christmas?" added Mr. Spivey, after we had digested this important information.

"Do you purpose to dismiss all your present clerks, sir?" asked Tom.

"Oh, dear me, no! But," said Mr. Spivey,

"that Denton will have to go, and young Jones, too. The one's a drunkard, and the other a puppy. I think, Mr. Christmas, if we replace them by two nice"—a pause—"respectable"—another pause—"well-educated"—one more pause—"*Christian*"—tremendous emphasis on this last word—"young women, we shall have wrought a great improvement. Now, what do you think?"

"I think," said Tom, "that two nice, respectable, well-educated, Christian young women, who could do the work, would quite meet our requirements. But of course they ought to possess all these qualifications without question."

"Oh, of course," assented Mr. Spivey. "Oh, dear me, yes. *Nice, respectable, well-educated, Christian* young women! What do you think, Mr. Tempest?"

"I think, sir," I said, "that the nice, respectable, well-educated, Christian young women will need one more qualification. They ought to be good-looking."

"Of course, of course," said Mr. Spivey, hurriedly, "that's included in the 'nice.' You're quite right, Tempest. You see, Christmas, they might have to serve customers now and then, and people like an attractive girl. Well, now, Mr. Christmas, will you put an advertisement in *The Daily Telegraph,* saying that we want a—let me see, we'll say 'of good appearance,' instead of 'nice'—that we want two respectable, well-educated young ladies of good appearance and Christian habits, as clerks. Letters only, to *The Telegraph* office, Christmas. You and Tempest must select a dozen of the best, and have 'em ready for me on Tuesday morning, when I come back from Brighton, and I'll select the two. Hours! oh, nine till seven, and wages—er—let me see—well, say ten shillings a week. Oh, and Christmas, give Denton and Jones a week's wages in lieu of notice, and let 'em go on Saturday."

We inserted the advertisement, as in duty bound, in the Friday's paper, and next morning

had several hundred letters in answer thereto. Alas, for our modern state of society, when young women are glad to go into slavery for a miserable weekly wage of half-a-sovereign! Ten hours a day of unhealthy toil in a close shop for as many shillings per week!

It was impossible for Tom Christmas and myself, whom Mr. Spivey had appointed judges in this important matter, to see all the candidates for the vacant offices, and we accordingly spent a busy day that Saturday in opening and reading the tremendous pile of applications, putting all envelopes aside which gave evidence of bad or slovenly handwriting.

"There's a pretty 'fist,' Tom," I remarked, showing him a square envelope ornamented by a neat Italian style of caligraphy. "I should say that the girl who wrote this is a lady."

He took it from me and looked at it musingly.

"Yes," he said, "it's a much better style than most of these young females indulge in. We

must lay that aside, Len. Ah, there's a portrait in here."

"Out with it," I said. "I wish we had told them all to send their portraits. What a collection we should have had!"

Tom cut the envelope open and slowly drew forward the photograph. I bent over and looked at it as he held it in his hands. It was just a small *carte-de-visite* size and showed the head and bust. A pretty girl, with just a trace of sadness about the corners of the mouth, and yet with dimples in her cheeks which showed that there was some fun somewhere in her disposition, and that she would like to laugh and sing if only the exigencies of life would admit of it.

"That's a pretty girl," I said, critically regarding the portrait. "She looks good and sensible, too. I think she would meet Spivey's definition. Nice, respectable, well-educated, Christian young woman. Put it aside, Tom."

"Let us see the letter while we are about it," he answered. "It is a nice style of hand-writing, too, and would look well for our invoices."

"Or in a billet-doux, Tom Christmas."

"Bah! Let us see what this young lady says."

They are much of a muchness, the letters which any employer of labour receives whenever he advertises for a female clerk. There is generally something about having been reduced in circumstances, attending school with the Misses Slogo, daughters of Sir Pomponius Slogo, twice Lord Mayor, and being remarkably proficient in all and every branch of arithmetic. There is also, generally, about six mistakes in spelling and half-a-dozen grammatical errors; and there is sure to be a postscript.

The letter which Tom Christmas was unfolding, however, bore none of these time-borrowed characteristics. It was well-written,

the writer conveyed her meaning clearly and concisely, and had evidently remembered that hers would not be the only letter which we should receive.

"What's her name?" I said, trying to read the signature. "Margaret Primrose, eh? Um, that's a pretty name, isn't it, Tom?"

"Sweet Maggie Primrose," he answered, looking dreamily at the letter. "What a capital title for a novel or a poem. A little ballad, you know, with a *L'Envoi* and a head-piece with two Cupids and some hieroglyphics scrawled about it.

> Sweet Maggie Primrose went one day
> Into the meadows a-making hay.
> Fair was the land and fair the sea;
> But nothing was half so fair as she!

Does 'she' and 'sea' rhyme, Len? Lord, it is so long since I tagged rhymes together that I forget. Lie there, sweet Maggie Primrose's letter, and take thy chance. See, Len, Maggie Primrose is a neighbour of ours. She resides

in that busy thoroughfare yclept the High Street."

"Then she is the Primrose of Islington," I replied. "And some day ruthless man will come by and pluck this primrose and cast it from him to die on the river's brim."

"And what may that mean, unrazored philosopher, or, as I ought to say, seeing that some folk never do shave, beardless boy?"

"It means," I said, "that it is a poor look-out for anybody who wants to become a clerk on ten shillings a week, and that an oak-tree would stand the storm better than a primrose."

And that suggested to him certain thoughts about the Position of Women, and from that he got to lecturing me on Social Science; and we forgot Maggie Primrose and only remembered her again when we had waded through the many hundred letters and selected two dozen applications.

"Len," said Tom, "these young ladies must come here on Monday, and out of the two dozen we must select twelve from whom Spivey must make his choice. It sounds something like the jargon of the slave-market, this, does it not? We can't help it, however. I am afraid Spivey will not regard the feelings of these young women so tenderly as we shall. Now, one thing is certain—they must not all call at the same time. Get four-and-twenty post-cards, Len. Now, write. 'Miss Matilda Smith—Dear Madam, will you please call here at nine o'clock sharp'—underline sharp, Len—'on Monday morning, and oblige, yours faithfully, Joseph Spivey.' 'Miss Mary Ann Jones'—ditto, except that you'll say a quarter-past nine. 'Miss Emily Harriett Spooner'—ditto, and half-past nine. 'Miss Deborah Robinson'—ditto, and a quarter to ten. 'Miss'—ah, here's sweet Maggie Primrose. Ten o'clock, Len. Why don't they all have names like that?"

"What was the barmaid's name, Tom Christmas?"

"The barmaid's name, Len? It was, I think, Ruby, or perhaps it was Pearlie, or possibly it was Tottie. But in reality it was Elizabeth Brown—a good name enough, but not poetic."

I dare say we did not think much about Maggie Primrose between then and Monday morning; but when we had seen and dismissed four applicants and the clock began to strike ten, we remembered that she came next on the list and looked for her coming with much interest. She was punctual to the minute, and seemed somewhat surprised to find two young gentlemen waiting to catechise her. My part indeed was to sit by and hear Tom talk, and vastly was I amused by the paternal fashion in which he drew his candidates out. Not one of them came who did not tell him all her little troubles.

Miss Primrose's story was a very short one. She was an orphan; she had no relations and few friends, and she wished to earn her living. She was at present engaged in a large millinery establishment in the City; but the hours there were from eight till seven, and she would like lighter work. She was dressed neatly, she spoke well, was prettier than her portrait, and would have been very pretty if she had had a little country air to put some colour in her pale cheeks. Tom told her to call next day and hear Mr. Spivey's decision, and led her out himself. He had not been so attentive to the other four, three of whom had proved to be forward cockney hussies with horrible pronunciation of a's and o's and remarkably knowing manners, while the fourth turned up her nose on seeing the establishment and said it wouldn't suit *her*.

It was with a feeling of deep thankfulness that we heard the door close on the last of the twenty-four. We had reduced them to twelve,

and the successful dozen were to attend at various hours next day in order to see the great Panjandrum himself.

"I hope Spivey will select the Primrose of Islington, Tom Christmas," I said as we walked home that night.

"So do I, Len, so do I. She is a nice, quiet, modest girl. But Spivey won't engage her."

"And why?"

"Because there are two girls coming who have had some previous experience in a publisher's office, and who would therefore be more useful. If they had not come in the way, Maggie might have got the post. I had thoughts of rejecting them; but I remembered my duty to the good, the generous, the honourable Spivey, and didn't."

"I hope you are wrong, then, Tom Christmas."

But he was right. For Mr. Spivey, on seeing

and listening to the two previously-experienced damsels, immediately engaged them, though for some reason or other he insisted on seeing the other ten applicants personally. Perhaps he thought that we were too young to break the bad news, and preferred, being a joined believer, to do it himself. Or perhaps he wished to see what the state of the Female Labour Market was, just as the traveller wishes to see what the slave-market is like at Constantinople.

"I am sorry you have not been successful," said Tom Christmas when Maggie Primrose emerged from Mr. Spivey's door. And she smiled and thanked him, and Tom again opened the door for her, all oblivious of the fact that he was attired in a most awfully dilapidated office-coat and certainly not much of an object for any lady's admiration.

Alas! Poor Tom Christmas had fallen in love.

CHAPTER V.

ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED.

MR. SPIVEY'S experiment in female labour was not successful, for the two previously-experienced young women whom he engaged did not turn out such paragons as he expected. They were not one half so careful as even Denton and Jones in reckoning up figures, they took offence if any one in authority ventured to correct them, and upon one celebrated occasion indulged in a grand cry because Mr. Spivey reproved them in the presence of the office-boy. Wherefore they left, and on the following Monday morning Messrs. Jones and Denton, who had often put their heads through the door and asked when they were to

come back, were reinstated in their old positions, and everything went on as in former times.

"That female labour experiment was not a success, Christmas," said Mr. Spivey; "I feared it would not be. However, it's not done us any harm, and I really think Jones and Denton are improved by their temporary suspension."

I was not so sure as Mr. Spivey about the amount of harm caused by his experiment in female labour. The experiment had brought Maggie Primrose to our office, and Tom Christmas had fallen in love with her.

I don't know how it was that I first found it out. I believe I had suspected it all along from the time when the little milliner's assistant, with her pale, pretty face and ladylike manners, had come to the office and found Tom Christmas very polite, in spite of his old coat and baggy trousers. After Mr. Spivey had made his final selection it was some time before we saw Miss Primrose again; but we often used to talk about

her, and wonder if she was still pegging away at the great millinery establishment in the City. And then, one morning, chancing to go to our office by way of Aldersgate instead of through Smithfield, we saw her tripping along with the melancholy crowd of human beings who go every morning into the City to earn their daily bread.

"Look, Tom," I said, "there's the Primrose over on the other side. Poor little Primrose, she looks paler than ever."

He looked across, and I think he blushed, or, at any rate, his cheek put on a little more colour, and his eyes brightened.

"Poor girl," he said, "I dare say she has to work very hard. I suppose she comes this way to the millinery place every morning. I wonder if she would mind it, supposing we stepped over the way and said good-morning?"

"I don't think she would, Tom Christmas. But why do you desire to waste two minutes

in making your way across a crowded street, in order to say good-morning to a young lady?"

"I—I don't know, Len. But, you see, the Primrose told us she had no father or mother, and I think no friends. Perhaps there is no one to say good-morning to her."

"Which do you think is the nearest way from our place to the City, Tom Christmas?" I asked. "You see the Primrose comes this way, whereas we go by way of Smithfield generally. I almost think this is the nearest, and I am sure it is more savoury than the other. There are so many visions of bloody carcases in Smithfield, and I never can help thinking that they may be cutting off arms and legs in St. Bartholomew's while the other butchers are cutting off shoulders and loins in the Meat Market."

"I don't think there is much difference in the distance," he said, still keeping his eye on the neat figure of the Primrose before us; "but we can change our route if you like, Len."

"I thought, perhaps, that you might like to walk down with the Primrose of Islington, Tom. She has no one to talk to her, and it might cheer her up a little if you took pity on her."

"I do pity her, Len. I know so much of life's struggles that I pity any girl who has to keep body and soul together in this wilderness on ten shillings a week."

As it turned out we were fated to meet Maggie Primrose again that very evening. Walking home at night we passed her in the High Street, and raised our hats, receiving a smile from her in acknowledgment.

"I believe," said Tom, when we had passed on, "that I have never lifted my hat to a lady for six years. Lord! what a clown I must be! Do I look very ancient and rusty, Len?"

"You look like a small country tradesman, Tom. Your coat does not fit, and your trousers bag at the knees, and are moreover braced up too tightly. The next thing, though, will be

that you will lay out five pounds in a grand new suit and go swelling it in Regent Street."

"I think not," said Tom. "Julia wants a new bonnet and it is really time the dear old marm had a new dress. I wonder what particular form of head-gear Julia will want this time. Something suitable for a joined believer, of course."

"Do believers ever become joined in any other sense?"

"I suppose they do, Len. But why?"

"Oh, nothing. I was only thinking it would be a jolly good thing if Julia would get joined to Dumbury."

"Julia marry Dumbury! My dear man, who would keep house for us?"

"Why, the Primrose to be sure, Tom Christmas. And a nice, tidy little housekeeper she would make, I'll be bound. A pudding prepared by her dainty hands would taste twice as sweet. And, I say, Tom, she would

let us smoke downstairs. Oh, let us go and ask Dumbury if it is good for man to live alone?"

"And who would ask the Primrose?"

"That would be your business. Confess, now, are you not in love with her, Tom the susceptible?"

"She is a very nice girl," he said, and would say no more.

A few days after that we came across the Primrose of Islington again. She was walking down the High Street, and so were we. We shook hands with her and walked on together to the City. I think it was Tom Christmas who did the talking. He put questions to her in his nice, quiet, semi-paternal fashion, and she answered them like a child. Was she still employed at Messrs. Snipper and Cuttem's? She was. He was sorry she did not succeed in obtaining the situation at Mr. Spivey's. So was she, as she thought the work would not have been so hard. At Messrs. Snipper and

Cuttem's, now, it was very hard, as she had to stand all day long. What, all day long? It was abominable, said Tom, and asked me if I had ever heard of such a scandalous thing. Upon which I said that I never had, and expressed a hope that Messrs. Snipper and Cuttem might some day experience something of the sort themselves. And from that we got to other subjects and chatted cheerily all the way to the General Post Office, where Miss Primrose went one way and we another.

After that it soon became a recognised thing that we should all walk to the City together every morning and home at night into the bargain. A wondrous fellow feeling exists between young men and women employed in business houses, and it was perhaps this feeling of *camaraderie* which made us all so friendly. This feeling was deepened when we found that the Primrose's father had been, like our own paternal parents, a country parson. She never

told us, at least in those days, how it was that she came to live alone in London, forced to work so hard for so miserable a pittance. But sometimes as we walked home of an evening, Tom Christmas used to say how grand things would be looking in his native Devon, and I used to swear that Yorkshire was a more beautiful county; and then Maggie Primrose's brown eyes would grow tender with some memory of better times, and she would tell us about the little seaside village where her father had lived and died.

I knew Tom Christmas would fall in love with her. I could see it from the first. I could see it in his eyes when he first caught sight of her in the spring mornings tripping along to that beastly millinery place; I could see it in the way he held her hand as he bade her good-night. I also noticed that he took some slight pains to make himself more presentable, brushing his clothes carefully, and tying his cravat in

the latest and most approved fashion, although he did not go to the length of purchasing new garments, as I had foretold. And I was certain of it when he took me upstairs with him one night after tea, and, having locked the study door, showed me, with an air of great mystery and deliberation, a handsome brass photo-frame from which looked forth the counterfeit of the Primrose. He set this up on his desk and looked at me in triumph.

"I knew how it would be, Tom Christmas," I said, dolefully, for I really felt sad. "I warned you, I prophesied unto you, and you laughed me to scorn. And now I shall have to walk to and from the City by myself."

He smiled and gave my arm a stalwart grip—a habit he had whenever he wished to show his affection or friendship—and answered that that would never be while ever he, Thomas Christmas, had legs wherewith to walk and tongue wherewith to converse.

"But seriously, Tom, have you been and gone and confessed to Miss Primrose that you love her, and would die for her, and all that sort of thing?"

"Not much of that sort of thing, Len. But I have asked her to marry me some day, and she has promised."

"Hooray!" I said, and seized Tom Christmas's hand and shook it till my own was tired. "I am as glad, Tom, as if it were I who had been accepted. I say, though, have you told Miss Julia?"

He shook his head.

"No," said he; "but I mean to do so to-morrow. I shall also ask Julia to go and call on Maggie."

"Do you think she will."

"Yes, if I ask her to. I shall ask her to take Maggie to church next Sunday morning and bring her to dinner, and we will go with them to church, Len."

"What, to Dumbury's church, Tom Christmas?"

"I suppose so," he said, with a sigh. "Never mind, we can think about something else while old Dumbury is holding forth. It will please Julia immensely if we go."

"I say, Tom Christmas, is Maggie Primrose a joined believer? Because, if not, don't you think you had better coach her up a little before next Sunday? Miss Julia is sure to put a few leading questions to her."

Miss Julia, I think, was not over well pleased to hear her brother's news, which he communicated to her early next morning. Possibly she foresaw coming troubles.

"I suppose you will be getting married next, Thomas?" she said, as she poured out our coffee. "I trust you will not hurry matters too much. Nowadays young men think of nothing else but getting married."

It stands to reason that if young men think of nothing but marriage, the maidens must be considerably influenced by their thoughts. Now Miss

Julia Christmas had been a maiden for five-and-thirty years, so that I think her conclusions were premature.

"I shall not marry for a long time yet, sister Julia," answered Tom.

"When did the fatal deed come off, Tom Christmas?" I inquired, a quarter of an hour later, as we were setting out for the City. "You are getting such a desperately deep sort of fellow nowadays that I can't make you out always."

"You remember last Sunday afternoon, Len," he said. "You went to sleep, you know, after dinner, and lay snoring until five o'clock. Unprofitable one! while you slept I went forth and won the prize. I met her, Len; she was going for a walk all by herself and I asked her if I might not go with her. We went out there by Highgate and Hornsey, and it seemed somehow, Len, that everything looked brighter and fresher than it usually does. You know the old church out there, with all its ivy fresh and green about it? We

went into the churchyard, and—and—and that is all," he concluded, somewhat lamely.

"And that is all, eh? Which means, Tom, that I am to imagine the rest."

"Imagine it or not, Len, you will never be able to conceive it until you go and fall in love yourself. Dear me! I seem to have lived ages since Sunday last. I am going to work terribly hard, Leonard, so that I can get some money in hand and get married. And then, my boy, if Julia does marry Dumbury, why, you shall smoke all over the house if you like."

Just then we overtook Maggie Primrose, and to her I repeated all the congratulations which I had already poured into Tom's ears. She thanked me very prettily, and looked up at Tom with a trusting air which I was glad to see. It really seemed as if this frail little Primrose had crept into the shadow of a rock big and strong enough to shelter her from all the storms of life.

After that I used to make all sorts of excuses

for leaving these two together in their outward and homeward walks. I used to put off my daily pilgrimage to the printer's establishment until five o'clock, at which hour I would divest myself of my office coat, and make myself ready for going out.

"Oh, by-the-bye, Tom," I used to say as I passed his desk, "I am just going down to the printer's, so I won't come back here. I'll walk straight home from there."

I never dared to look him in the face while I uttered these pieces of casuistry, but once taking a side peep at him I saw that he, too, was somewhat shy of looking at me. And so we continued deceiving each other, or rather I continued to deceive him, for I believe he thought to the very end that my duties always took me away at an earlier hour than usual.

The Sunday whereon Maggie Primrose was introduced to Mrs. and Miss Christmas was quite an eventful one. Tom and I, attired in our very

best, proceeded about ten o'clock to Miss Primrose's lodgings (she boarded with a most respectable greengrocer and his good lady, who were really very kind to her, and whom I shall always think a great deal of for that reason), and escorted her in a sort of semi-state to our house. I think she never looked prettier than she did that morning, for the excitement brought a little colour to her cheeks, and her brown eyes were full of light.

"A werry nice couple, sir," said Mr. Migson, the greengrocer, who was smoking his Sunday morning pipe in the door as we went forth, and with whom I lingered a moment to pass the time of day and make myself generally agreeable. "A werry nice couple, hindeed, as I 'ave said to my missus many a time of late."

He jerked his thumb, first in the direction of Tom and Maggie, and then in the direction of Mrs. Migson, who was tidying up the breakfast in the little parlour.

"I am very glad you approve of Miss Primrose's choice, Mr. Migson," I said. "For I am quite sure you and Mrs. Migson must have taken a great interest in the young lady."

Mr. Migson removed the pipe from his mouth and spat with great vehemence across the pavement.

"Lord bless *you*, sir! why, the hinterest wot we takes in that there young lady is sumthin' wonderful. We thinks more of her than we should of twinses—which we never had no babbies ourselves in *our* time. Between you an' me, sir, the pore young thing's to be pitied. Father was a parson, and she's a lady. Well, there ain't no finer and stiddier young feller than Mr. Thomas Christmas 'twixt here an' Land's End, that there *ain't*, s'elp me bob! W'y, I've known 'em ever since they come into the Square—nigh on to seven year. I've supplied 'em with every wegetable they've ever eaten, and they don't owe me a penny, sir, not a penny, and there's precious

few of my customers can say *that*. He's a rare 'un, is young Mr. Christmas. I seen him off and away, bright and early, in a morning to his work, and home to his mar in a hevenin'. None of yer publics, and free-and-easies, and hifalutin torf business for *him*. W'y, you don't have to send in a bill there at all! As reg'lar as the fust o' the month comes round here he is with his 'Now, Mr. Migson, what do I owe you, sir?' Tell yer what it is, sir—when missie comes and tells me and my missus—which she looks on us as sort o' friends—that she's a-goin' to marry Mr. Tom Christmas, I says, 'Then, my dear, you're a-going to marry the very bestest young man in all Hengland!'"

I told Mr. Migson that I believed he was quite right, and was glad to know that he had such a good opinion of my friend. I also told him that it was very kind and Christian-like of him and his good lady to be so kind to Miss Primrose, on receiving which praise he blushed

very much beneath his tanned cheek and shuffled about from one foot to the other.

"W'y, you see, sir," said Mr. Migson, "it's werry hard, ain't it now, for a pore young thing like missie to be left an orfund? You wouldn't like it yourself now, would you, sir? And when she fust comes to lodge here, and we see how pore she was and yet the lady in everythin', we sort o' took to her. We ain't much of scollards, me an' the missus, and the Scripture reader, wot comes round with them there track papers, says as 'ow we're both heathens cos we don't never go to church nor chapel; but our motter, sir, is, 'Let's do as much good as we can,' and that we means to stick to, blarmed if we don't."

I said good morning to him then and followed Tom and Maggie, feeling that I should hear nothing half so true or beautiful at Mr. Dumbury's fashionable church as the sentiments conveyed in Mr. Migson's "motter," despite the fact that that gentleman was only a heathen. I was late in

consequence of remaining to talk with him, and when I got to the house Tom had gone through the ceremonies, and Miss Julia had retired upstairs to put on her bonnet.

Maggie was sitting by Mrs. Christmas when I entered, while Tom stood by the window watching them, and Sarah Ann, the maid-of-all-work, peeped through the door with a laudable desire to catch a glimpse of our new visitor. Mrs. Christmas, who was just the least bit weak in her head, was evidently highly pleased with her son's sweetheart, and sat stroking Maggie's hand, much as a child strokes a new toy. Julia, too, I could see, was not unfavourably disposed towards her prospective sister-in-law.

"A nice, modest, lady-like girl, Leonard Tempest," she observed to me as we came back from church, where Mr. Dumbury had been most profoundly faithful and had preached us a discourse on sudden deaths, "and one that I quite approve. Though, perhaps, not perfected in

sanctification she promises in time to become a very precious vessel. She told me as we came to church that she had never missed attendance on the means of grace twice a Sunday in all her life. A great example for some people, Leonard Tempest."

"Yes, Miss Christmas," I said, meekly. "I hope she will influence Tom for good."

"If Thomas Christmas could be influenced for good, Leonard Tempest, his sister would have influenced him long ago. I have pleaded with him, and my late dear friend, the saintly Emma Jane Piper, strove hard with him. He is given over to his idols."

"What sort of idols, Miss Julia?"

"Thomas Christmas, Leonard Tempest, is a confirmed unbeliever. He has striven to seek into the secrets that no man has a right to learn. I give him up. Mind that he does not make shipwreck of you also. Remember, Leonard Tempest, that you will have to die."

"Thank you, Miss Julia. I'll strive to remember it."

I am afraid that poor Maggie found it rather tedious, that Sunday afternoon and evening at our house. Miss Julia's ideas of Sunday would have done credit to that arch-heretic Calvin himself. She shuddered if anybody laughed, she closed her eyes and groaned if Tom or I spoke of secular matters, and if she had seen us take up a newspaper or a novel she would have looked for the wrath of Heaven to descend upon us. On Sunday afternoons she used to give her mother, who was too infirm to go to church, a volume of sermons out of the big bookcase, and the poor old lady had bad times of it if she was unable to converse with her daughter about the selected discourse on the latter's return. Sarah Ann of the kitchen, having washed up, and mended the fire, was expected to repair to Mr. Dumbury's Sabbath-school, where Miss Julia also went and taught for a couple of hours. Sarah Ann, I think, did not

enjoy the day of rest very much. She had to go to church again at night, and did not get even a chance of speaking to a male person, because Miss Julia's eagle eye was on her small figure all the way there and back. I often laugh now to think what a doleful, dismal day Sunday must have seemed to that poor maid-of-all-work. She had to learn a "text" some time during the day and repeat it to Miss Christmas. After supper was over she had to read her Bible in the kitchen, which she did in the most conscientious fashion, spelling every word aloud, and piping forth the result in a high, thin voice which would have done credit to the blind men who read in the streets. If she ever ventured to request "something with pictures in it," Miss Julia used to give her a large quarto copy of "Foxe's Book of Martyrs," which contained a number of engravings quite as remarkable for ingenuity as the letter-press itself. Over these horrible conceptions poor Sarah Ann used to sit with pallid cheek and beating heart

thinking, I doubt not, of the horrible moment when she should have to climb candleless to bed, and there dream of rack and thumb-screw and fire.

Tom and Maggie went out for a walk that Sunday afternoon, and Miss Julia and Sarah Ann having departed to Sabbath-school, I remained at home with Mrs. Christmas and heard her talk. She was very fond of talking, and had as great a talent for reminiscences as Greville or Mosley; indeed, she would have been invaluable as the chronicler of a movement, for names and places and deeds jumbled themselves together in her head in the most approved fashion, and if she began to tell you an anecdote respecting the Duke of Wellington she was sure to divert it into one of General Tom Thumb—the connecting link being the fact that they were both military men, and that Major Piker, Mrs. Christmas's father, knew both of them. We went to church again in the evening, and I noticed that Tom went to sleep as

soon as Dumbury gave out his text, and slept soundly, but without snoring, all through the sermon. And then we came home, and, after supper, Miss Julia conducted the family devotions. And then Tom opened the old cottage piano and asked Maggie to sing for us, for he had found that his sweetheart possessed a voice. And he and Maggie having found an old copy of "Hymns, Ancient and Modern," which collection Miss Julia at once denounced as Popish, our little Primrose sat down and sang us "Abide with Me," and "Rock of Ages," and "O Paradise," and finally "Lead, kindly Light." And Tom Christmas, hidden behind the window-curtain, cried, I am positive, being susceptible and soft-hearted and a great baby, and I, too, felt my eyes somewhat dim, and Miss Christmas, in spite of the Popish hymn-book, melted a little, and kissed Maggie when Tom took her away to good Mr. and Mrs. Migson's domicile.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. RUPERT TREMAYNE.

I HAVE already told you that Mr. Spivey was very fond of the company of great people, and that he would do anything and go anywhere in order to have a few minutes' chat or even a cool nod from anybody who was Somebody. I have also told you that his somebodies very often turned out to be nobodies, with unpleasant habits of borrowing half-crowns and asking for advances out of the petty cash. I think this was perhaps a righteous judgment on Mr. Spivey for presuming to make himself that which he certainly was not. But despite the fact that his somebodies were usually very disappointing, Mr. Spivey, who was nothing, if not plucky

and persevering, stuck to his guns with much zeal, and made bold efforts to bring down something that should be worth exhibiting. Snubs, like that which the well-known Bumpo administered to him, seemed to glide away from his soul like water from a duck's oily back; failures, like that which he experienced when he published Mr. McMurdo's novel, a production in which Spivey had much confidence, and every one else no pleasure, only determined him in his onward course. He was bound to capture something great some day — only the capture must be effected at very small cost. *That* was where the difficulty came in. Great authors, or hawthurs, as Spivey called them, could have been had in plenty, if the cheques had been correspondingly big; but Spivey's idea was to have a big bag for a very few cartridges.

Now, in the early summer of the year 187—, there appeared from the press of a London firm, a novel or novelette, which set everybody

by the ears. That is to say, one portion—the least intelligent—of the reading public vowed that such a work had not been issued within the memory of the oldest inhabitant; the other portion—the most intelligent—said that if productions of this class were to be looked upon as good work, it was quite certain that our national tastes were going to the bad, instead of to the good. Nevertheless, both portions of the reading public bought and read the book, which was sold at a shilling, and stood in huge piles on every bookstall in town and country. I dare say the most intelligent class of readers read the book with as much avidity as the least intelligent, although, as is the way with your clever people, they affected to despise its style and tone. It was, of course, a very sensational book, and dealt with themes which the last ten years have hackneyed for us; but which were then comparatively new to English fiction. Murders there were in plenty,

with much realism and detail; there was also more than a trace of supernatural dealings, and there was that contempt of certain national virtues which some of our novelists have taken to borrowing from the novelists of a less healthy nation. The style and theme, in fact, were new—wherefore the people left the old paths and went to bow down before a new idol. Then, too, the book was published under an assumed name, and the latter was one eminently calculated to impress itself upon the imagination of young ladies and very young gentlemen. It was Rupert Tremayne. Fancy the possibilities existing behind a name like that! Who might not Rupert Tremayne be? Perhaps a member of our nobility, who had been blighted in his early youth, and after wandering through the earth like Cain or Mephistopheles, or some of those other nice, interesting people, don't you know, had written down this fascinating chronicle of love and passion. Perhaps the main incidents

were passages from his own life. Indeed, they must be, for who could have imagined so gruesome a murder, or such thrilling descriptions of the grand passion? Yes, Rupert Tremayne must indeed be a remarkable man—half Corsair or Giaour or something of that sort. So declared the young ladies who read the book and lay awake half the night weeping o'er the wrongs of its hero, who was indeed such a remarkable character, that if he had lived in civilised circles, he would infallibly have been sent to Portland for ten years, or finished off altogether at the hands of Mr. Calcraft's successor.

When a book makes a sensation the first question asked by everybody is—has the author written anything else? Everybody asked this in connection with Mr. Rupert Tremayne's book. Were there any other works of his? Who published them? What were they called?

Alas, Mr. Rupert Tremayne had only published one previous volume—a book of tender

little things, bound in delicate apple-green cloth and entitled "Lotus and Aloe." They, too, were of the please-pity-me order, and produced as many tears as the realistic story. They gave an insight into the author's soul, and opened up vistas of moonlight and perfume and kisses, and jewelled daggers, and mysterious deeds done in Venetian chambers. The little apple-green volume found its way into every boudoir, and some of its more understandable contents were set to music and sung by æsthetic-gowned damsels in Mayfair drawing-rooms, amidst a general sense of unutterable woe and misery.

And after this of course Society began to clamour for the man himself. It must see him and hear him, and invite him to balls, and routs, and tennis. He must pose on river-side lawns and at a minister's breakfast-table in company with Professer Trotaround, the Asiatic Explorer, and Mr. Tapthumb, the eminent pulpit orator, and Miss Chickamanga, the American actress.

He must give himself up to be stared at, and exhibited, and bowed down to, and therefore Society set itself to find him out and bring him forward.

Anything of this sort is of course a veritable godsend to people like Mr. McFlynn. The paragraphs which he wrote in *Sparks* concerning the mysterious Rupert Tremayne were legion. "We have it on the best authority that the distinguished author who veils his identity under the pseudonym Rupert Tremayne, is a young and well-known member of the aristocracy who figured a year or two ago in a well-remembered *cause célèbre,* and who has since travelled through all parts of the globe." "We are in a position to state that Rupert Tremayne is the assumed name of the D—— of C——, whose name was so prominently before the public a year ago, in connection with that of a celebrated and very beautiful burlesque actress!" "We hear that Rupert Tremayne is not, as we formerly announced, the D—— of C——, but we can now

state positively that the peer who veils his identity under this now well-known *nom de plume* is the young E—— of F——, whose name," etc.

Now it chanced that when Rupert Tremayne's novel first appeared Mr. Spivey bought a copy of it. I suppose he did so because it had the picture of a very beautiful young woman on the back, for Mr. Spivey had a great weakness for beauty in any form. I don't know whether he was impressed or disappointed by the story; but when the second edition appeared in a few days with a loud flourish of trumpets from the lucky publishers, Mr. Spivey pricked up his ears. Two or three days more saw a third edition called for, with more braying of trumpets and display of heavy-typed advertisements, and Mr. Spivey began to get uneasy. When the fourth edition appeared, and everybody began to ask everybody else if he or she had seen Rupert Tremayne's novel, Mr. Spivey became feverish, and made a vow that he would secure this goose

of the golden eggs for himself. He got McFlynn into his sanctum and asked that worthy Hibernian if the paragraph about the D—— of C—— was true. McFlynn laughed in his face, and seemed quite unable to understand Mr. Spivey's credulity. No, he said, the paragraph about the D—— of C—— was purely imaginary, and, for aught he knew to the contrary, Rupert Tremayne might be a miserable hack-writer living in the dreariest house in Grub Street.

That morning Mr. Spivey shut himself in his own sanctum and locked the door, previously commanding everybody to observe strict silence and disturb him on no account whatever. He also washed his hands at the sink downstairs, and gave the office-boy a shilling wherewith to purchase a new towel. He further instructed Mr. Denton to lay a new pad of blotting-paper on his desk, and put a new pen into his holder, and to pour a fresh supply of black ink into his gorgeous inkstand.

We all knew, from previous experience, what this meant. It meant that Mr. Spivey was going to compose! Yes, from the brain of Spivey there was about to come forth a letter, a letter designed to subdue and conquer whosoever should read it.

At the end of an hour Mr. Spivey came forth red and triumphant, a sealed envelope in his hands. He marched through the office, and through the shop, and out at the door. He had gone to post the important missive with his own hands.

After he returned, he summoned Tom Christmas and myself to his presence. He sat at his desk with the air of an Alexander who has resolved on conquering a new world.

"Christmas and Tempest," said Mr. Spivey, playing carelessly with his elegant paper-knife, "I am about to develop the business very largely. For a long time I have contemplated issuing a new series of shilling novels. Shilling novels,

you know, are going to be all the rage. I have deferred commencing publication, however, until I could meet with an hawthur whose name would command the sale."

It seemed to me that plenty of authors might have been found if Mr. Spivey had only looked in the right place for them ; but I bowed politely, and he proceeded.

"You are both aware that that new novel by Rupert Tremayne is selling like wildfire. I have written this morning to Mr. Tremayne and offered him first-class, *first-class* terms. I don't think there's another house in London or anywhere else that would pay such terms. Of course he'll take them. Now, Christmas, if a letter comes for me, enclosed in an envelope with my writing on it, don't open it, but keep it for me."

Tom Christmas promised to obey.

"This'll mean a good deal to you two young men," continued Mr. Spivey, grandly. "If the thing pays we shall have to remove to much

larger premises, and your salaries will both be doubled."

I beg Mr. Spivey's pardon. He did not say "salaries," he said "wages." It was his idea to keep his clerks in a state of servitude, and servants get "wages," whereas "salaries" are paid to secretaries, and F.O. people, and members of H.M. Government.

"I have been obliged to write to Mr. Tremayne at his present publisher's," said Mr. Spivey, "as no one knows his address, nor, indeed, who he is. It may therefore be a few days before I hear from him; but you'll keep the letter, Christmas, for me alone."

Mr. Spivey was in a state of feverish anxiety during the next few days. He came earlier to the office every morning and went away an hour later every evening. He walked into the shop every half-hour and inquired of Tom Christmas if that letter had not come yet.

On the fifth day it came, and Tom carried

it into Mr. Spivey's office. Ten minutes later we were both summoned to hear that gentleman communicate a great piece of news. *Mr. Rupert Tremayne,* the mysterious, proposed to call upon Mr. Spivey at ten o'clock the following morning !

I believe that Spivey was nearly wild with excitement all that day, and I feel certain that he did not sleep a wink all night, so overjoyed was he at the thought of capturing this very great man. He came bright and early to the office on the auspicious morning and sat in great dignity in his sanctum, while Tom Christmas and I lingered on some pretext or another in the shop, for we, too, were foolish enough to be curious about the new "hawthur."

At five minutes past ten a tall young gentleman, well-dressed, of well-bred appearance, but not otherwise remarkable or distinguishable from the type which you may see in Bond Street or Piccadilly any morning, entered Mr. Spivey's shop

and advanced to the counter. Tom Christmas stepped forward to meet him.

"I wish to see," began the stranger, and then he stopped and looked hard at the head clerk. "Good Heavens!" he cried, "isn't that Tom Christmas? Tom, my dear fellow, what are you doing here? I thought you were dead."

He held out his hand and Tom Christmas took it, looking like a man who walks in his sleep.

"It's—it's—it's Frank Lestrange, isn't it?" he said, staring at the other's face as though he were not sure of his guess.

"Hush! Frank Lestrange once, Tom, but Rupert Tremayne now. Hah, hah, hah! Rupert Tremayne, indeed. The D—— of C——! The E—— of F——! But, Tom, what are *you* doing here, and where have you been these six years past?"

He laughed again, and sat himself down on the edge of the counter, seeming very much at

home, and very well satisfied with himself and the world in general. Tom Christmas, who still appeared mystified, stood staring at him.

"It's so long since I saw an old friend," he said, at last, "that I seem to lose my head now that I do see one. So *you* are Rupert Tremayne?"

"I am that mysterious personage, Tom. But tell it not in Gath, publish it not, and so on. And now, Tom Christmas, whom I remember as a hard-working student and dangerous batsman, what are you doing *here?*"

He looked round him with contemptuous eyes, taking in every detail of Mr. Spivey's dingy establishment. He was clearly not impressed by what he saw.

"You don't mean to say, Tom Christmas, that you are — are *employed here?* You, with your talents and scholarship?"

"I am employed here, and am glad to be, Lestrange. Talents and scholarship in the

bush are not worth so much per week in the hand."

"But your talents were in hand, man. But there, you know best; and you have not told me all. We must have a chat together, some day soon. Is your father dead, Tom?"

"Six, nearly seven years ago, Lestrange."

"Was that why you left Oxford so suddenly?"

"It was."

"Poor old Tom. Ah, well, time changes everything. You are Tom, a publisher's clerk. I am Rupert Tremayne, the successful author. Tom, you once lent me twenty pounds. Will you let me pay it back?"

"If I really did lend you it, Frank. But are you sure?"

"I am certain. Let me recall the incident. Do you remember a bad boy who had been betting and could not raise all the money and went to the good boy?"

"Who happened to have it? Yes, I re-

member. You can give me the twenty pounds, Frank. I can do with it nowadays."

"Let me lend you some, Tom, do!"

"I don't owe anybody a penny, Frank. When I do, I will borrow something. Not before."

"As you will. Well, now, I came here to see an individual named Spivey. Funny name, Spivey. I once knew a man who made coffins with a similar name—the man, I mean. But it was Twivey and not Spivey. Where is Spivey, Tom Christmas?"

At that moment Mr. Spivey, who was beginning to think the very great man somewhat unpunctual, opened the door of his office, and came into the shop. Seeing a well-dressed young gentleman sitting on the counter in conversation with Tom Christmas, he strolled towards them, his thumbs in his waistcoat-pockets.

"Mr. Spivey," said Tom Christmas, "this is Mr. Rupert Tremayne."

Mr. Spivey turned round and stared in astonishment. The very great man sitting on his counter and talking to his clerk! He opened his mouth and fairly gasped.

"My dear sir," he said, when speech returned to him, "how do you do? I was not aware that you had arrived. Christmas, why didn't you show Mr. Tremayne into my office at once?"

He held out his hand to Lestrange as he spoke. The rising "hawthur" looked at the hand, but did not take it.

"Er, Mr. Spivey, I presume?" he said.

"That's my name, sir. Come into my office," said Spivey, drawing back the insulted member.

"Tha—anks, but I've not quite finished with my friend Mr. Christmas, yet. Tom," he continued, turning his back on Spivey, who stood transfixed with surprise, "when will you come and dine with me? And shall it be at the club or at my chambers? To-morrow evening let it be."

"I will think of it, Frank. I am not much given to dining out."

"But you will dine with me, my old friend. Think it over while I speak to Mr. Spivey."

He turned away, and having intimated to Mr. Spivey that he was at that gentleman's service, they went into the private office. As they passed my desk, I had a good look at Lestrange's face. He had good features, and was what women call handsome — that is to say, he had a straight nose, and a beautiful moustache, and curly brown hair, and he held himself erect, and looked very distinguished without seeming to know it. His face was very brown, as if with travel or exposure, and across his right cheek there was the distinct mark of a sword cut. But I did not like him. There was something in his eyes, which I could not fathom, and there were lines about the corners of his mouth which told of evil passions. I mistrusted him from the beginning.

Mr. Spivey, in his excitement, forgot to close the door of his private room, and as my desk was very near, I was able to catch every syllable of the conversation which followed.

"You know my clerk, Christmas, I find?" said Mr. Spivey, as a pleasant way of beginning the interview.

"Mr. Christmas is an old college friend of mine," said Lestrange.

"Ah," said Spivey, "he's a very excellent servant, very excellent indeed. I took him on as a sort of charity, you know."

"I am not anxious to know anything of your motive in employing Mr. Christmas, sir. I dare say he does a day's work for a day's wages."

This was another snub for Spivey. He shuffled about in his chair and I have no doubt got very red. Lestrange continued.

"You wrote to me about a new story," he said. "My hands are very full, but it is always

well to make hay when the sun shines, and you spoke of exceedingly liberal terms, so that I felt compelled to call upon you. May I ask you to explain definitely what it is you want?"

I don't think Mr. Spivey had ever been addressed in this fashion before. Most of the "hawthurs" who came to him were very poor-spirited creatures, and used to tremble in his presence. It was a very humble Spivey who proceeded to unfold to Mr. Rupert Tremayne his scheme for a series of shilling novels.

"It has occurred to me," concluded Mr. Spivey, "that you would contribute the first story, and I am prepared to be very liberal, very liberal indeed."

"Very good. Let us come to terms. How many words do you require?"

Mr. Spivey made an elaborate calculation.

"About eighty thousand, Mr. Tremayne."

"Very good. And what do you offer for the copyright?"

Mr. Spivey moved very uncomfortably in his arm-chair. His ideas of liberality were limited, and he felt like the girl feels who is going to take a header into the cold sea and trembles at the thought.

"What do you think, Mr. Tremayne?" he said, as a feeler.

"Oh," said Mr. Tremayne, "if you wish it I will tell you my terms; in fact it will save trouble if I do, as I should not accept less. I will write you a story, containing eighty thousand words, for a thousand pounds."

I heard Mr. Spivey jump. In my mind's eye I could see Mr. Spivey turn pale.

"Pooh!" he said, after he had recovered his breath. "My dear sir! Why there are not five people living who can get that price. Preposterous!"

"Good morning, Mr. Spivey," said Lestrange. "I am sorry you have put me to the trouble of calling here for nothing."

"Can't you really take less?" asked Spivey, unwilling to let him go. "Say a hundred now, and a royalty."

"I have told you my terms, sir. Good morning."

"But, my dear sir——"

The independent "hawthur," however, was gone; and Mr. Spivey, flying after him to the office door, saw him walk up to Tom Christmas, say a few words to him, and go away with a hand-shake to the shabby clerk whom Mr. Spivey had taken on for charity. Mr. Spivey's very great man had escaped him.

"You know Tremayne, I find, Christmas," said Spivey, sidling up to Tom after a time.

"He is an old college friend of mine," answered Tom.

"And is Tremayne his real name, Christmas?"

"No, sir. I am not at liberty to give my friend's real name," said Tom, who knew quite

well what Spivey was after. And with that Spivey was fain to be content.

We heard nothing more of the shilling series, nor of the tremendous rise in our wages; and the name of Rupert Tremayne was as an eye-sore to Mr. Spivey, especially when he found that that gentleman's books continued to sell in enormous quantities, and that other publishers were making fortunes out of him.

On the second day after Tremayne, or, as I shall call him in future, Lestrange, had been to Spivey's, Tom Christmas arrayed himself in an old-fashioned dress suit and went away from the office to dine with his old friend. And that night Maggie Primrose went without her usual walk. But she was glad and proud to know that Tom had come across some one who knew him in his more prosperous days.

It was late when Tom returned, and everybody but myself had retired to rest. He sat down to tell me all about it.

"So you have returned from your dissipation, Tom. Miss Julia has been much alarmed lest you should come home in a state of intoxication."

"And yet I am quite sober, Len. I dare say my head will ache to-morrow morning, though, for I am not used to dining so late. It seems as if I had gone back to the old life a little to-night."

"I am glad, Tom. It will have done you good."

He shook his head as if in some doubt as to the truth of my assertion.

"I don't know, Len, I don't know. I have dropped away from it all, and it is, perhaps, not well that I should catch glimpses of the lazy, easy life that I once lived."

"If I were a Grand Inquisitor, Tom Christmas, you should burn for that heretical statement. You lazy? Never!"

"Lazier than I am now, Len, at any rate. I was as a lily of the field; I toiled not, neither did I spin—unless you can call sweating after Greek

verbs toiling, and spinning yarns labour. Will you smoke, Len? See, I have got some cigars. Lestrange filled a case and put it into my pocket."

"Who is Lestrange, Tom?" I asked, after we had lighted that gentleman's weeds and made ourselves comfortable before the kitchen fire. Miss Julia only allowed us to smoke in the kitchen. "I know, of course, that he is a successful maker of unhealthy fiction, though I will say no more of that in consideration of the fact that I am smoking his remarkably good tobacco. But who is he?"

"Lestrange, Len, is a fellow who read with my father for a few weeks one summer, and afterwards was at Balliol with me. I have very little idea as to who his people are, for I never remember hearing him speak of them. Some one used to find him money and pay his debts at Oxford, but I don't think he had many relations, for he never went anywhere during the vacations as other fellows did. When we went home he used to go to Italy or Switzerland and come back

with plenty to talk about, but with none of those home-for-the-holidays reminiscences that other fellows had."

"And what made him turn author, Tom?"

"I don't know, Len, unless it was that he wanted a new amusement, or that he has a natural gift that way. He has been telling me his story to-night. He has seen some strange things and people."

"I am all attention, Tom Christmas."

"You know, Len, that I left Oxford very suddenly. Very few of my friends there knew what became of me. It's a strange thing that when a fellow has money in his pocket he likes to mix with his fellows; when he has none he likes to be by himself. That was my case. When I found that I should have to work I seemed to lose all inclination to let my old friends know of my whereabouts."

"And yet, Tom, most men would have gone to their old friends for help."

"Perhaps. I didn't. I didn't like to. It was in consequence of this that I lost sight of Lestrange. He, it seems, came of age soon after I left Oxford, and found himself a rich man. Very soon after that he was rusticated. Always a wild sort of fellow, Lestrange. I don't think he cared two pins for the rustication. He went abroad, and has been travelling up and down the world for five years, meeting with all manner of strange adventures. He has seen some fighting by land and sea; has been nearly to the North Pole, and round the globe six or seven times, and, having got sick and tired of it, came home last year and settled down in some particularly comfortable rooms in Jermyn Street."

"But the authorship?"

"I don't think Lestrange much cares to talk about authorship, his own at any rate. He published the poems a couple of years ago, and he told me to-night that the book didn't sell at all, until this novel came out. He

wrote the novel after he came home—for amusement, he says. It is selling enormously, Len. The two hundredth thousand is out this week."

"What did he get for it, Tom? Did he tell you that?"

"He got twenty pounds, Len. Twenty pounds for the copyright."

"And he refused Spivey's hundred?"

"Ah! but he has got some tremendously good commissions. Much as he professes to despise money, he is a keen hand at a bargain. He is writing a tale for Sheets and Binder for a thousand, and another for a syndicate for another thousand; and the first novel is being dramatised under his own supervision."

"He is a lucky fellow, your friend Lestrange, Tom Christmas. Do you like him?"

"Do I like him? Why, Len?"

"Because I should like to know whether you do or not."

"Yes," he said; "I do like him. I think

him a very clever fellow—a man with great talents. Then, too, he is kindly and generous to a fault. He would do anything for any one to whom he took a fancy."

"Do you know, Tom, that I am a great judge of character? Now, I will tell you what I thought of Lestrange's face. He is a creature of strong impulses. He will follow whatever pleases him at the time, with the ardour of a bloodhound, and he will tire of it just as quickly. Am I right?"

"I believe you are, Len. He is impulsive."

"Again, he is an egotist. An egotist, Tom Christmas, of the worst sort. I don't think he would go about talking of himself or his own deeds; but I will tell you what he would do. He would make his own will his idol, and spare nothing and nobody in order to worship it. Am I right again?"

"I believe you are, Len. There are excuses for him, though. He has practically lived by

himself all his life. He has always been his own master. No one has ever had any real control over him; he has been able to gratify every wish as it came up. A man like that, Len, must needs be selfish. And yet he is open-handed and generous to the last degree."

"As so many selfish men are, Tom. Well, Mr. Lestrange seems to be settling down to authorship, at any rate. Let us hope he will stick to it. What did he think of your prospects, Tom?"

"He didn't like them, Leonard. He asked me to become his secretary, amanuensis, or whatever you like to call it, at a salary twice as large as my present one."

"And you accepted?"

"No," he said, "I did not accept. You see, Len, I know that Lestrange is variable and eccentric. In six months he may tire of London and sigh for Thibet, for which outlandish country he would at once start. Then where should I

be? No; badly as I am paid at Spivey's, I shall not leave my present post. I can keep out of debt at present. I know that Spivey will never let me go if he can help it. And I have learnt, Len, to be content with little. So long as I have my health and enough to live on, I shall be satisfied. I dare say Spivey will some day see his way to giving me five pounds a week. And with that and Maggie, I shall be satisfied, ay, more than satisfied, for life."

"Where be all thy dreams of wealth, Tom Christmas?"

"Where they always were, my dear. I shan't refuse wealth if it comes to me, Len. But I'm not going to kill myself in order to get it. 'Man wants but little here below,' you know. Did you see Maggie to-night, Len?"

"I did, Tom. After I had eaten my evening meal and heard Miss Julia tell your mother some wondrous anecdotes about the late St.

Emma Jane Piper, I walked round to the High Street and called upon Mr. Migson and Miss Primrose. Those Migsons, Tom, are particularly nice people."

"They are—good, honest folk as ever lived. And what was Maggie doing? Poor little soul, I was wondering all the time how she was getting along."

"My dear Tom, she was getting along splendidly. It being nine o'clock, Mr. Migson had closed his shop and was a-washing of himself in the scullery. The parlour was beautifully warm and bright, and Miss Maggie was reading by the fire. Mrs. Migson was cooking something beautiful for supper. I am almost certain it was beefsteak and onions. It smelt so grand that I felt hungry. Mrs. Migson pressed me very much to stay and eat, but I declined. I am glad, Tom, very glad, that the little Primrose has such good friends in these humble people."

"And so am I, Len."

"And I have got a piece of news for you, Tom. Old Migson told me to-night that he and his missus have long desired to possess a piano, Migson being musically inclined, and his wife having once possessed a very fine 'seconds' voice. And to-day he has bought one—thirty-five pound ten, Tom Christmas—and you and I are to go to-morrow night, if we will be so condescending, and hear missie try it."

"What good folks! Ah, Len, the upper crust little knows what a lot of real gentility is hidden in the lower."

"Tom Christmas, thou art a Tory! Upper crust, indeed! And pray which is the lower?"

We went upstairs to bed then. As we were separating at the door of my room, Tom told me that Lestrange was coming to have supper with us some day, soon.

"He asked after my mother and Julia, to-night," he said, "and seemed pleased at the

thought of seeing them again. Len, shall we invite Spivey to come? How proud he would be to put his legs under the table with those of so famous a 'hawthur'!"

"And that table the table of his clerk. No, Tom, not Spivey, please. Will Maggie come?"

"Of course, Len. I told Lestrange all about her to-night, and showed him her portrait. Yes, Maggie will be there."

There was once a spider which possessed a very grand parlour, and there was a fly which—but everybody knows the rest.

CHAPTER VII.

GALATEA.

THE supper-party at our house was a very grand affair indeed, for Miss Julia put her heart and soul into it and served up a banquet fit for the gods. I have always thought that if Julia Christmas had a weakness it was in the housekeeping way. She liked to see spotless linen, and bright glass and silver, and flowers, and plenty of light, for all of which things she would I doubt not have easily found Scriptural authority if required. When she heard that her father's old pupil was coming to visit us, she immediately commenced preparations, and got out all the best silver, together with many other wonderful things; so that Tom and I, when the

eventful evening came, were quite surprised, and mentally wondered if we were not dreaming.

It is really wonderful how indulgent women of the Julia Christmas type are to men like Lestrange. She knew all about his freaks; she knew that he was what is called "wild;" she remembered that he was a graceless lad and likely to develop into a graceless man; she must have known from his novel — which she read, because *he* had written it — that his record was a not over cleanly one; and yet, in spite of all, she killed the fatted calf for him, and proposed to make exceeding merry over his coming. Nay, more, she who was usually so plainly attired, came downstairs that night in purple satin, looking a new woman. She had a fine, well-developed figure, and a commanding presence, and in her fine gown looked more like a duchess than a member of Mr. Dumbury's congregation. She had also caused her mother to array herself in a very fine silk dress, which

rustled exceedingly, and she had made the old lady a new cap, so that Mrs. Christmas sat in her easy-chair, and marvelled at her own finery. Indeed, her gala attire gave reins to her imagination, and she told me and Maggie Primrose many long and very particular stories about bygone days.

Maggie, too, looked at her best that night. I cannot remember how she was dressed; but I know that she and Julia Christmas made an agreeable contrast and showed each other off. The one was a strong, self-possessed woman, whose will no earthly power could bend or break; the other a pretty, childish girl, whose will could be swayed in any direction, if one did but set about the work in the right way.

It was nine o'clock when Lestrange arrived. He was in evening dress, and looked taller and handsomer than when I had seen him previously. He shook hands reverently with Mrs. Christmas, making some appropriate allusion to

the last time he had seen her; greeted Julia with the hearty good-will which young men so often show to a good-looking woman who is a few years their senior; bowed in the most courtly fashion before Maggie, and congratulated her in brief, well-chosen terms; and was good enough to shake hands with me. His well-bred air and good looks carried him into everybody's favour; his exquisite tact put us all at home with him in five minutes. He addressed Miss Christmas as "Julia," and bade her remember that when he last saw her she had been accustomed to call him "Frank," a reminiscence which pleased Miss Julia immensely, and brought a blush to her round cheek.

We were all very merry during the meal. Everybody was in good spirits, and everybody talked. Lestrange and Tom Christmas were full of old Oxford memories, and the one spurred the other on, though neither of them needed much prompting, for Lestrange was a ready

talker, and Tom, once set going, was the longest-winded man I ever knew. I don't think I talked much, for I was very hungry, and few men can talk and eat. But I kept my ears and eyes open, and I saw that Lestrange often glanced at Maggie Primrose, and that Maggie's round eyes were often turned on him.

After supper we all sat round the fire, and were very comfortable. Often nowadays, closing my eyes, I can see the little circle again. Mrs. Christmas sat in her arm-chair, I sat next her, and Lestrange sat in an easy-chair next me; then came Julia at his right hand, and Tom Christmas sat at the opposite side of the hearth, with Maggie Primrose, on a low seat, between him and the fire. It was all very nice and very comfortable, and Miss Julia actually informed us that we might smoke, and never coughed once.

And then some one, Tom, I think, induced Lestrange to tell us something of his travels.

He was reticent at first, but when Julia also prompted him to give an account of himself, he hastened to comply. And, having asked our permission, he turned down the lights, saying that the firelight was so much more fitting to the telling of stories, and so there we sat, with the shadows dancing about the room and Lestrange talking.

I don't think I have ever heard a man speak who had such a beautiful voice as he had. Every note was a pleasure to listen to, every tone was modulated to a nicety. His voice sank and fell as he talked, and made a stream of melody. And yet all was unconscious, all without effort. I don't think he knew that he had such a good voice; if he did, he never betrayed the knowledge in the slightest degree.

He had seen a great deal, and was able to tell us of some wonderful sights and adventures. He had been with an exploring party to the

North Cape, and with a noted traveller through Africa. He had lived all alone for six months in North-West America, and had penetrated a long way into the interior of Australia. He had helped to dig for ancient Greek remains in the Morea, and had found traces of long-lost nations in South America. He had been shipwrecked in the Atlantic, and becalmed in the Pacific. He had, in fact, though in a much more extensive fashion than the poet imagined, surveyed mankind from China to Peru.

I am bound to say, in fairness to him, that Lestrange left himself out of his narrative at much as possible. There was no dragging of his own name and deeds into the exciting adventures he told of; nay, it might have been of some one else's travels that he was speaking, so little did we hear of himself in direct fashion. And yet somehow his every word seemed to bring him more vividly before our eyes as the hero of his story. We sat spell-bound while he

talked, and I think none of us had even a desire to interrupt him by a question.

Once, catching a glimpse of Maggie Primrose's face as the firelight danced up, I saw that she was watching Lestrange, her eyes fixed upon him with an expression which I had never seen there before. An uneasy feeling broke over me when I saw that, and I began to wish that Tom's friend was not so brilliant. Othello the Black could win a Christian maiden from her father; might not this modern knight cause the modern maiden to waver in her allegiance to the poor squire who could tell of nothing but hard work?

> She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
> And I loved her that she did pity them.

It was past midnight when Lestrange went away. I walked with him to the nearest cab-stand. Out of the house his mood changed, and he began to talk about the change in Tom Christmas's fortunes.

"What a life!" he said. "To serve a fellow

like Spivey, a man who throws his h's about like pepper, and was probably taught to read in a Board School! And now all the spirit seems to have gone from him."

"From whom?"

"From Tom Christmas. He used to be full of spirit; and now he looks broken down and worn."

"And yet he is happy."

He gave me a glance out of his dark eyes.

"Happy? There are so many sorts of happiness. The slave is happy, I suppose, in knowing that his meals and clothes are provided for."

"Tom Christmas is happy in being content."

"Content? Now of all the damnable cant in this world, that of content is the very worst! A man never should be content. Of course it is in the catechisms; and Julia Christmas would tell us that it is our first duty to be content with the state to which we have been called.

Luckily, Mr. Tempest, this world's law is not contentment but progress, otherwise we should all be dirty savages, eating each other, and little better than the apes and gorillas."

I knew he was so far right there that I said nothing in answer. Presently he began to speak of Julia Christmas.

"A fine woman," he said. "And a clever woman. A bigot, of course. She always will be a bigot. But she will do well. In the Middle Ages she would have been either Lucrezia Borgia or St. Teresa. I should have preferred her as Lucrezia. Adversity, I think, has destroyed Tom's spirit, but Julia has a lot in reserve. I suppose it is conservation of energy."

He got into a cab, ordered the man to drive to a well-known club and went away, and I walked home, feeling somehow ill at ease. In the square I overtook Tom Christmas, who had been conducting Maggie to Mrs. Migson's.

"What a grand fellow he is, Len, and what a splendid talker!" said honest Tom. "I could have sat and listened to him all night. Did you ever hear any one who could talk as he can?"

"No," I answered, for I never had.

"It was most curious to notice the effect his story had on Maggie," continued Tom. "As we sat in the firelight I had my hand on hers, and sometimes the pulse beat quite quickly and sometimes it went slowly. You remember him telling us of that thrilling adventure with a lion in Africa? When he came to the critical moment Maggie's pulse all but stopped; when the danger was over it began to beat furiously. She told me afterwards that she could almost see the whole scene."

"Your friend Lestrange's powers of conversation are very brilliant, Tom—and very dangerous."

"Yes," he said, as if he had hardly heard me. And we began to talk of something else.

Before leaving us, Lestrange had asked us al

to go and dine with him at his chambers on the following Saturday evening. He had selected that day because Tom and I were able to leave the City earlier on Saturdays than on other days. He had asked a lady friend, he said, to play the part of hostess, and he should take no refusal from any of us. And we all promised to go, Julia, however, making an express stipulation that we should be allowed to depart not later than eleven o'clock.

It was a very grand entertainment which Lestrange gave us that Saturday evening. He occupied a suite of very fine rooms in Jermyn Street, and one room seemed to have been fitted up as a drawing-room for the occasion. Here, on various stands and tables, were arranged a large collection of objects which Lestrange had brought together during his five years of travel. For an hour before dinner he showed us these, exhibiting things which we had often heard and read of, but never seen, and making his descriptions so real

and graphic that we felt as though we were living in some enchanted palace.

Lestrange's rooms, indeed, seemed more like a fairy scene from the Arabian Nights than a set of apartments in prosaic London. There was no hideous glare of gas; everything was lighted by coloured lamps. He had prepared a retiring-room for the ladies, and I caught a glimpse of its magnificent appointments, bathed in a rose-tinted light, as we passed the open door. The dining-room seemed to glow with light, and the table was a glittering mass of silver. Flowers of the most expensive varieties were everywhere. Three men-servants, evidently highly-trained in their calling, waited upon us. Tom Christmas whispered to me that Lestrange had been getting up an extra swell affair in honour of the ladies.

It was seven o'clock when we went to dinner and nearly nine when the ladies left us. We followed them within a few minutes, and very soon Tom Christmas, who had an insatiable

thirst for knowledge, asked Lestrange to give us some further particulars of his adventures. And Maggie Primrose seconded the request with a glance from her brown eyes.

"Are you not tired of my adventures?" he said. "Come, I will show you something better worth seeing than my stories are worth hearing—something that will interest the ladies; though you, Julia, I fear, will tell me that I am paying you a doubtful compliment in saying so."

"Whatever it is, let us see it, Frank," said Julia Christmas. "On you be the blame if we are tempted."

He rang the bell and directed the two footmen to bring in certain cases which they would find in his study. Presently they returned carrying two large oblong boxes of cedar-wood, afterwards going back and bringing two more.

"These four cases," said Lestrange, "contain a complete collection of Eastern female attire—Greek, Egyptian, Hebrew, and so on. It was

formed for me by an old antiquary at Damascus, whose work on Eastern habits and customs lies on that table. Now, Miss Julia, shall we feast our eyes on these vanities?"

"I am afraid it is very wrong," sighed Miss Julia. "But, after all, it is interesting. Please open the boxes, Frank."

I am not going to describe the garments which came from the huge cedar-wood cases. There were dozens of them, all wrapped in some curiously-scented paper, and each distinctive of a certain nation and period. To Tom Christmas and me they were a mass of white, blue, and red; but Julia and Maggie Primrose were in raptures over them. Lestrange, who had commenced a learned lecture on the tastes of various nationalities as illustrated by female costumes, was soon left out in the cold, while the ladies admired, and exclaimed, and criticised, and wondered.

"But you know," said Miss Julia, "one

cannot admire these things properly without trying them on. Don't you know that there is nothing so pleasing to the female mind as the trying on of new gowns? How should I look, for instance, in this Greek dress?"

"Like Juno, or Minerva," suggested Tom Christmas. "Better array yourself in it, Julia, and pose before us.'"

"Nay," she said. "I am too old. But you, Maggie, might wear it. Come, if Mr. Lestrange will allow me, I will attire you as a Greek maiden."

I could not make out what was coming over Julia Christmas. She was actually turning frivolous and making herself agreeable to everybody, and I began to look upon Lestrange as an enchanter. Julia caught up the Greek dress and with a little laugh of amusement led Maggie to the door. But the little Primrose, suddenly struck shy, hung back.

"Oh, but——" she cried, and looked, not

at Tom Christmas, but at Lestrange. He glanced back at her, and she followed Julia out of the room.

We were silent after they had gone, and we could hear them laughing and talking in the little room which Lestrange had had fitted up specially for them. Presently Julia returned, and we all looked round in expectancy.

There was a heavy curtain of dark material hanging before the door of the little room, and on its threshold, one white arm holding the curtain back, stood a fair Greek maiden. Tom Christmas started to his feet in surprise.

"Maggie!" he cried.

"Nay," said Lestrange, "but Galatea. Galatea as she comes forward to greet the master who has called her into rosy life."

She was, indeed, Galatea stepping down from the pedestal. Her arms and neck were bare, her brown hair was knotted up in the correct style, a great gold belt spanned the dainty waist and

gold bracelets pressed the white arms. The long white draperies falling in straight lines to the sandalled feet arranged themselves artistically about the perfect figure. As she stood there, one arm holding back the dark curtain, one hand falling at her side, her breast gently heaving beneath the crossed folds of white, her head slightly bent and her face covered with soft maidenly blushes, she looked the very counterfeit of Pygmalion's statue sprung to life.

"Do I find favour in the eyes of my lord?" she said, softly. And she raised her eyes and looked, not at Tom Christmas, but at Lestrange.

"Why, Maggie!" cried Tom, "I did not know you were so beautiful. Frank, could you dress me up to look like that? Would my snub nose and red hair come out well in ancient Greek toggery?"

And then we all laughed; and, after we had admired the Greek dress again, Maggie slipped

away and soon came back to us in nineteenth-century garb.

Somehow no one seemed in a humour for conversation that night, and we began strolling about the rooms examining the various curiosities which Lestrange had picked up. Tom and Maggie and I wandered into Lestrange's study, there to inspect some old manuscripts, and left Julia and our host talking by the fire in the drawing-room. We stayed looking at the books and papers for half an hour, and then, finding my companions rather dull company, I went back to the others.

The carpets in Lestrange's rooms were very soft and thick, and an elephant might have walked over them without making his presence known. At any rate I reached the folding-doors, which opened out of the dining-room, without their hearing me approach. And, standing there, I looked into the room and saw that Lestrange and Julia were standing side by side near the

fire, and that the estimable old lady who had played hostess had gone to sleep in an easy-chair set in one of the recesses. Julia was speaking, and when I caught her voice I stood still, not knowing whether to retire or enter.

"You have soon forgotten," she was saying, with something of bitterness in her voice.

"Soon? Come, Julia, eight years is a long slice out of thirty. And, remember, you would not listen to me eight years ago."

"You were only a boy then," she said.

"Quite true — I was a boy. Don't be angry, Julia. It can't be. I shall never marry."

"You would have married eagerly enough, *then*," she said.

"I dare say. But I shall not now."

She turned away from him, and walked across to the window. I also turned and went back to the study, considerably mystified. So there had been passages of a romantic nature

between Frank Lestrange and Julia Christmas, had there? That explained Julia's change of manner during the past few days.

Surprises seemed to be thickening about our little domestic circle just then. When we reached home at half-past eleven that night, we were met at the door by Sarah Ann, who, in a high state of excitement, informed us that the Reverend Mr. Dumbury was awaiting our arrival and meanwhile talking to Mrs. Christmas.

We went into the dining-room, all three of us, wondering what had brought the faithful Mr. Dumbury to call upon us at that time of night. Certainly he did not live very far away; but we had never been honoured with such a late visit from him, so far as I knew.

Mr. Dumbury sat by the fire, his neat shoes turned to the cheery blaze, and his hands spread over his capacious stomach. I noticed at once that he had some great news to communicate,

for his well-fed countenance wore a highly important expression, and the glance of his eye betokened triumph and gratification. He was naturally a rather pompous man, but on this occasion his grandeur seemed to overpower, and almost metamorphose him. He rose as we entered and shook hands all round with us, balancing his gold glasses in the other hand very gracefully.

"And what brings you here, Mr. Dumbury, at this disreputable hour?" asked Tom Christmas. "I hope you have some good news for us."

Mr. Dumbury assumed an elegant and would-be-easy position, and coughed.

"I have just informed your worthy mother," he said, looking at Julia Christmas with approving eyes, "that a great burden has been cast upon me."

This was rather a doleful beginning. But I quickly found that Mr. Dumbury's utterances were somewhat of the nature of parables.

"The Prime Minister, my dear friends," he resumed, looking round on us with an air of importance, "the Prime Minister, Lord Bigborough, has asked my acceptance of the Bishopric of Grandchester."

He watched us narrowly to catch the effect of this announcement. Tom Christmas and I were speechless, but I heard Julia catch her breath sharply.

"It is a very heavy responsibility," said Mr. Dumbury, "a very heavy responsibility indeed. The see of Grandchester is one of our most important sees."

"What is it worth, sir?" asked Tom Christmas, bluntly.

"I am not — er — quite sure," said Mr. Dumbury, modestly. "But I almost fancy the emoluments are about six thousand pounds per annum."

"Six thousand pounds a year!" said Tom. "Take it, sir, take it."

"My dear young friend," said Mr. Dumbury, blandly, "it is not at the stipend of an office that a humble vessel should look. He must consider whether he be called."

"How do you feel about it, sir?" asked Tom.

"I have prayerfully considered the matter," said Mr. Dumbury, slowly, and with due emphasis, "and I am now consulting the more responsible of my flock. I have also to-day consulted several clerical brethren. I may say that all advise me to accept Her Majesty's offer. Her Majesty, the Prime Minister tells me, has heard much of my humble efforts in this part of London. It is very pleasing, my friends, to know that one's efforts are appreciated."

"Very gratifying indeed, sir," said Tom.

"My dear Miss Christmas," said Mr. Dumbury, "you have always been a very earnest member of my congregation. I feel that your advice, your sisterly advice, in this weighty matter, will

much help me in arriving at a decision. What do you say?"

Julia Christmas had remained very quiet after hearing her pastor's news. She had kept her eyes fixed on the fire and was evidently thinking hard about something. She looked up as Mr. Dumbury addressed her, and turned her face towards him.

"My advice is—accept," she said in a low voice. "Accept—by all means."

Mr. Dumbury heaved a sigh—whether of regret or of gratification I cannot say.

"I will take the advice of my kind friends," he said. "It will be a serious responsibility, very serious. There are some four hundred beneficed clergy in my—in the diocese of Grandchester, and about half as many curates."

"I hope it is in a pleasant neighbourhood, sir," said Mrs. Christmas, who was getting sleepy, and began to mix up dioceses and livings.

"The palace," said Mr. Dumbury, speaking as

if he had been used to palaces all his life, "is a most delightful residence, and is situated about three miles out of Grandchester in the midst of a very large park. The society round Grandchester is very select. Truly, it is an onerous position. Ah, my dear friends, to what responsibility am I committing myself."

"Well, sir, I congratulate you with all my heart," said Tom Christmas, who seemed unable to get the six thousand pounds out of his head. "And I hope you will live long to enjoy your good fortune."

"Thank you, Thomas, thank you. It is consoling to know that one has the wishes of one's friends. Ah, if my dear old friend Christmas had but lived, how invaluable would his advice have been at this moment! Julia, my dear friend, may I have a few words with you in private? With your dear mother's permission."

Julia Christmas rose from her chair, perfectly self-possessed, perfectly cool, and walked into the

next room, the Bishop-to-be holding the door open for her. He followed her and closed it behind them.

"Well, of all the games!" said Tom Christmas. "Whatever will happen next? After seeing my Maggie in that masquerading dress, and now hearing that old Dumbury is to be a Right Reverend Lord, I'm almost prepared for anything. What will be the next thing, do you think, Len?"

"We shall have a wire from Spivey, saying that he has taken you into partnership, Tom Christmas."

"I wish that would come true," he said. "And see, Len, the dear old marm is going to sleep. I wish my Lord Bishop would go."

But before Mrs. Christmas had fairly dropped off, Dumbury and Julia returned, the former very pompous, the latter still self-possessed, but with a little more colour in her cheeks than when she had left the room.

"My dear madam," said Mr. Dumbury, "my

dear friend Thomas, my dear young gentleman," condescendingly turning his episcopal eyes on *me*, "I have another announcement to make. Our dear Julia has promised to become Mrs. Dumbury at an early date. It is not good for man to live alone, and the Apostle saith that a Bishop should be the husband of one wife. Wherefore I have selected my dear Julia, whom I have known from infancy, and whose worthy father was my first vicar."

Whereupon Mrs. Christmas wept, and kissed her daughter, and blew her nose very loudly and very often, and said she had always known it from the very first, and Tom and I shook hands with Dumbury and wished him great happiness. And I think we were all a little moved, except Julia, who was as self-possessed as ever.

The events of that day had been so exciting that I could not sleep when I went to bed; and, after tossing about for quite an hour, I resolved to get up and read, hoping that that would send me

to sleep. But I found that I had no work of a soporific nature in my bedroom, so I carefully opened the door and stole downstairs, intending to lay hold of a volume of sermons which I had seen in the dining-room, and trust to their aid in seeking a healthy slumber. I reached the room without making any sound; but, before I could enter it, I saw that Julia Christmas had not gone to bed yet, and was standing before the fire gazing at something.

Presently she moved, and I saw that she was looking at a small box which stood on the table at her side. She unlocked it as I stood there and took from it two or three things which were worthless in themselves, but evidently valuable to her, judging by the way in which she held them and looked at them. There were some flowers, and one or two letters, and a photograph.

She stood looking at them a long time, and then she suddenly pressed the portrait to her lips and kissed it passionately. And that over, she

tore it into little pieces and threw them with the flowers and the letters into the few ashes that were still burning in the hearth. And I went back to bed, feeling that Julia Christmas was a strange woman and a clever one.

In about a month from then she and Dumbury were married and went away to the South of France for a few weeks, after which they returned for Dumbury's consecration, which took place at Grandchester Cathedral, and was a very imposing ceremony. And then they settled down at the palace and began to rule their diocese with strong arms.

As for me, and Tom, and Tom's mother, things went on in pretty much the same way. I advised Tom to follow his sister's example and get married, but he said that he would wait until the coming spring, when he believed Mr. Spivey would give him a substantial increase in his salary. But as Mrs. Christmas wanted a companion, Maggie Primrose gave up her situation at the

millinery place, and came to live with us, and Mrs. Christmas grew very fond of her, and was not so much afraid of her as she had been of Julia. And we cleared all the dreadful Emma Jane Piper books out of the front room and made it very cheerful, and used to smoke elsewhere than in the kitchen.

And sometimes, during that winter, Lestrange used to call on us.

CHAPTER VIII.

TOM GOES OVER SEAS.

BEFORE spring came round again, Mr. Spivey, instead of increasing Tom Christmas's salary, had charged him with an important commission, the duties of which were calculated to take him far away from Paternoster Row for many a month. Mr. Spivey, who rarely read anything except for special reasons, had been reading up about our Australian colonies, and he formed the idea—that is to say, it "occurred" to him—that a branch of his business might be established with much profit and advantage in Melbourne or Sydney. He accordingly proposed to send Tom Christmas out there in order to carry this new idea into practical working order. I don't think Tom cared very

much about leaving England for so many months. He was to start in March and return about the end of November; and, I dare say, it seemed a long time to him. As for Maggie Primrose, she was against it altogether, and begged Tom to stay at home. Even when he had explained to her how much it would be to his advantage to fall in with Mr. Spivey's wishes, she was opposed to it. I think our little Primrose felt safe when Tom was near and unsafe when he was away. At any rate, she took the news very much to heart, and was terribly uneasy about it from the moment it was settled upon until the time of his departure.

When Tom Christmas first told me of Mr. Spivey's proposal, I strongly advised him to marry before he went away. The sea-trip, I said, would do Maggie good, and he would not feel so lonely as he would if alone in a strange country. But he shook his head at my proposal and said it would not do.

"In the first place, Len," he said, "I could

not afford to take Maggie with me. Secondly, there is no one to leave with my mother."

"Mrs. Christmas might go to the Bishop's for a few months," I suggested.

Tom shook his head.

"I don't think she would care to do that," he answered. "No, I shall get back as quickly as possible, Len, and then we will have a wedding, and you shall be my best man. I suppose we shall have to invite Dumbury to officiate, Len, shall we not?"

"I suppose so, Tom Christmas. If we do not we shall have to settle matters with Mrs. Dumbury."

"Fancy me being married by a real live Bishop!" he said, laughing. "We shall have to insert the announcement in the papers, I suppose, Len. It will look like the marriage of some big swell instead of that of poor Tom Christmas. But perhaps, Len, his lordship of Grandchester will not condescend to tie the knot."

"If I know anything of his lordship's lady, Tom Christmas, I think he will condescend."

"Why, yes," said Tom, with a thoughtful expression. "I fancy Julia has the whip hand of him."

As, indeed, she had. Julia Christmas had married Bishop Dumbury with a view to her own advancement; and she had made up her mind that her husband should gratify her ambition in every way. She meant him to be Archbishop of Canterbury, or, at any rate, of York; nay, I think she would not have objected to his turning Papist, providing he could by any means have attained to the Papal Chair. She decided when she married him that he should make his mark in something beside his episcopal duties, and she also decided that the best way in which he could do so was by following her commands instead of trusting to his own powers. So that Dumbury, after a few weeks of married life, discovered that he had married a strong-minded woman who believed herself capable

of managing his affairs better than he could manage them himself.

In those days Julia Dumbury was a very busy woman. After they returned from the honeymoon and Dumbury had been consecrated Bishop, she plunged into active work, and immediately gained a name and fame amongst the more influential people of the diocese. She went about her self-imposed duties with tremendous energy, but did not forget her hereditary duties as Bishop's wife. The clergy round about Grandchester, who had been disposed to look askance at Mrs. Dumbury, soon made up their minds to worship the rising sun, and came to her dinner-parties with smooth countenances and well-oiled tongues. Gentlemen, who wanted anything in the way of preferment, also quickly discovered that it was far better to consult the Bishop's wife, than to apply direct to the Bishop. Young incumbents, who had been endeavouring to muster up courage to assume coloured stoles and burn

candles, ceased their ceremonial labours on learning that Mrs. Dumbury was decidedly opposed to Ritualism in any shape or form. Rumour soon spreads amongst people who have little to do; and everybody in the diocese of Grandchester quickly learnt that Bishop Dumbury's lady was the real power of Grandchester Palace.

I always supposed that Julia would want to work some radical change in her brother's affairs if ever she got a chance of doing so. When she married Dumbury and became allied with the Bench of Bishops, she evidently decided that she must do something for Tom Christmas, for she came over to London one day, and remained over night with us in Canonbury Square, in order to persuade her brother to leave Mr. Spivey's establishment, and embrace the profession in which Mr. Dumbury, or Dr. Dumbury as he now was, had attained so much fame.

I had gone home early that afternoon, and

I found Mrs. Dumbury sitting with her mother. I thought she looked older; certainly she had lost the almost sprightly air which came to her when Frank Lestrange renewed his acquaintance with her family. She was very richly dressed, and looked quite stately and dignified, and was altogether calculated to impress the casual beholder.

She had already communicated her views to Mrs. Christmas and to Maggie Primrose when I arrived, and she was gracious enough to favour me with a repetition of them before Tom came.

"I look to you, Leonard Tempest," she said, with a touch of almost episcopal authority, "to help me in persuading Thomas Christmas to fall in with my views. It is not seemly that he, a clergyman's son, should be occupied as at present, and I and Bishop Dumbury feel this and propose to do something for him."

"I shall be very glad to help you in persuading Tom to whatever may be for his good,

Mrs. Dumbury," I said. "May I ask what you propose?"

"We propose that he should take Orders," she said. "There are several very good livings in the diocese of Grandchester, and the Bishop would present Thomas to one if he will follow out our wishes. Old Mr. Champney of Hogley-poke-cum-Switherton is very infirm and cannot live long, and the Bishop would make arrangements for Thomas to succeed him. It is worth seven hundred and fifty a year."

I looked at Maggie and saw her eyes sparkle for a moment. I knew what she was thinking. Seven hundred and fifty pounds a year meant that she and Tom would be happy for the rest of their lives. There would be no slaving away at Spivey's all day and drudging in the attic-study till midnight. Tom would have rest and leisure, and she would have a pretty vicarage with a rose-garden and trim flower-beds. The picture had its attractions for Maggie. I dare say that

if she had been rich all her life, it would have possessed none. But as she had known what it is to be very poor, it was as attractive as the fairy palace is to the child.

Julia, too, saw that longing look on Maggie's face, and knew that here was a powerful ally. She began to talk to the girl about the vicarage of Hogley-poke-cum-Switherton, and described its charms and beauties very cleverly. Tom, she said, could have as much leisure for his scientific studies as he pleased, for the parish was one of sparse population, and it had always been usual to keep a curate, while Maggie would find most enjoyable society, and be within five miles of the palace. All of which made the picture still more attractive in the little Primrose's eyes.

It was to a characteristic group that Tom Christmas came home that night. There was his sister, the great lady anxious for her own sake to do something for him; there was his

mother, understanding very little about the matter, except that her son was to be a great man; and there was Maggie, his sweetheart, her brown eyes alight with pleasurable anticipation. I think he saw there was something on the tapis as soon as he came in, for he sat down to his dinner in silence, and prepared to listen to whatever message Mrs. Dumbury was just then charged with.

He heard her very quietly to the end, when she finally delivered herself of the important communication, and I think he saw with what eagerness his mother and his sweetheart awaited his reply. As for me, I was not eager or curious: I knew well enough what his decision would be.

"A comfortable vicarage, a pretty village and church, a small population, plenty of leisure and good society, and seven hundred and fifty pounds a year?" he said. "That sounds very nice, Julia, very nice indeed. It sounds like rest, and peace, and quiet for the remainder of one's life. Why,

I think I should be able to write a book or two with all these advantages."

"I am glad you see it in a proper light, Thomas," said Mrs. Dumbury, graciously. "You will no doubt be enabled to do useful work under the conditions I have mentioned."

"I hope to do useful work under any and all conditions, sister Julia," said Tom Christmas. "But my work does not seem to lie in the direction you wish me to take. I am sorry that I cannot meet your wishes."

"Not—meet—my—wishes!" Mrs. Dumbury was astonished.

"Oh, Tom," cried Maggie. "And I was so pleased!"

"My dearest," said Tom, laying his broad hand on his sweetheart's little fingers, and speaking in his slow, deliberate way, "I dare say you were pleased. I suppose the mention of seven hundred a year would call up pleasurable ideas in every one's mind. Unfortunately, Maggie,

it is quite impossible for me to do what Julia wishes."

"And why, pray?" asked Mrs. Dumbury.

"My dear Julia," said Tom Christmas, "do not my reasons occur to you at once?"

"I know of no reasons, Thomas, which would support you in your denial," said the Bishop's lady.

"Yet there are many. In the first place, I am not a member of the church in which you wish me to minister."

Mrs. Dumbury stiffened out and raised her head.

"Become a member, Thomas Christmas. *I* have talked to you of it more than once."

"You have, Julia. But that is impossible. I cannot accept your offer, kind as it is; for I neither belong to your sect nor approve its doctrines."

"Approve—its—doctrines! Thomas Christmas! Doctrines? But that will do. I have

done my best for my family, and I have failed. You might, however, have remembered that you are thinking of marriage, and that some one beside yourself would have enjoyed and benefited by the position I offered."

A clever shot, Julia Dumbury, a very clever shot. Tom Christmas turned his head and looked at Maggie, and she did not look back at him with eyes full of trust and confidence, as she should have done—and as, alas! very few women would do—but kept them fixed on the fire. He sighed and went out of the room, giving my arm a fervent squeeze as he passed me. And soon after that, I went upstairs and found him writing as if for dear life at his rickety table in the shabby attic. He was not going to be a Dumburyite in spite of his poverty and his hard work.

It was, perhaps, natural that Maggie Primrose should not quite understand Tom's reasons for declining his sister's well-meant offer. She looked

upon Tom as the most saintly and perfect of mortals, and would, I have no doubt, felt able to recommend him, if she had ever had the chance, for the first deanery or bishopric that offered. When Julia spoke of Tom as an unbeliever, and backslider, and general religious ne'er-do-weel, Maggie's brown eyes would flash indignant fire and her red lips pout in righteous protest. Tom, she knew, was the best and kindest of mortals. And yet she could not understand his scruples about Mrs. Dumbury's offer.

The Bishop's lady returned to the episcopal palace in deep chagrin, and Tom went on with his daily routine at Mr. Spivey's establishment. And from that time there was a great coolness between the Grandchester people and their humble relation.

It was very soon after this episode that Mr. Spivey issued his instructions to Tom about the Australian voyage, and I think that the chief cause of Maggie's regret was the thought

that Tom, if he had only seen his way to accepting Mrs. Dumbury's offer, might have remained at home and made his fortune in more convenient fashion. I tried to console her for Tom's departure, by pointing out to her how advantageous his trip to the Colonies would be in more than one sense. I bade her remember that he would not be absent many months, and that accidents do not often happen nowadays to well-appointed steamers. I told her that if Tom carried his business to a successful issue, Mr. Spivey would infallibly raise his salary to that five pounds per week, which was the present height of Tom's ambition. But no word of consolation found favour in Maggie's ears, for she seemed to have some prevision of coming evil.

The day of Tom's departure came with lightning-like rapidity to Maggie and me, and at last he had got his leave-taking over and he and I were driving away to the station.

"You'll take care of Maggie, Len?" he said, looking at me wistfully.

"As if she were my own sister, Tom. Make yourself easy on her account. And we shall have you back, you know, in no time at all."

"Ay," he said, dreamily, "six or eight months is not a long time. And yet who knows what may not happen in six months? Take care of them both, Len, my dear, till I come back."

And then I pressed his hand and said good-bye, and the train had carried him away, and I was left in charge of the two women for whom he thought and worked. Somehow I felt that the world seemed darker and less comfortable with Tom Christmas removed from my part of it. Spivey's establishment, indeed, seemed miserable without him. Mr. Jones had been promoted to Tom's place, and general chaos and confusion was the result for some days. Spivey got bad-tempered, and more than

once declared his intention of wiring for Christmas to come back. The adage that a good workman's never appreciated until he's lost, was fully exemplified in Tom Christmas's case.

We were very dull in Canonbury Square after Tom's departure. Mrs. Christmas, it is true, was full of reminiscences and told us on the day of her son's sailing a long story about her great uncle Piker, who was a sea-going party and came to a watery grave in the English Channel, on the very spot over which Tom's steamer was probably passing just then. But this had anything but a cheering effect on Maggie Primrose, and it taxed my best energies to divert her mind from its sad thoughts. How she got on during the day I don't know; but I never returned from the City at night without finding her and Mrs. Christmas talking together, or rather finding the elder lady talking and the younger listening. And as Mrs. Christmas's stories were invariably of the shipwrecky

order, I fancy that poor Maggie grew to regard horrors and sorrows as her natural daily food.

I was not sorry, when I came home rather late one evening, to find Lestrange sitting with my two charges. Maggie Primrose looked brighter and less *distrait*, and Mrs. Christmas was listening to Lestrange, content to play the part of audience now that a more capable entertainer was present. And Lestrange had plenty to talk about. We had not seen him for three months, and we asked him where he had been. He had been on the Continent, he told us, in France, and Germany, and Italy; one of his uneasy fits having seized him soon after Christmas, and driven him forth to wander in some sunnier clime. And for Maggie's benefit he proceeded to tell us all that he had seen, and made himself so very agreeable and entertaining that midnight came and took us unawares and found even Mrs. Christmas wide

awake and much interested. I let him out when he rose to go and walked a few yards along the Square with him, telling him how it was that Tom had left us, and informing him that Maggie had felt his departure very keenly. And he was kind enough to say that he would come again soon and help me to entertain Mrs. Christmas and Miss Primrose, and keep the one from thinking about shipwrecks and kindred disasters, and the other from brooding over her lover's absence. And, in accordance with this promise, he came again the following week, and brought Mrs. Christmas a number of Continental views, and Maggie a box full of novels. And after that he began to come regularly, so that we looked forward to his visits as a matter of course, and thought it strange if he did not present himself. But he seldom failed to put in an appearance, though he was very often obliged to call in the afternoon instead of evening, so that I

personally was not benefited. On these occasions, however, the two ladies had so much to tell me about Mr. Lestrange, that I rarely missed much of what he had said.

I grew to like Lestrange. I had disliked him at first, and had then grown to admire him against my will; finally yielding myself to his fascinating and agreeable manners, until I thought him one of the most accomplished and brilliant men in the world. Very soon I no longer wondered that Tom Christmas should think so much of him, or that the ladies of our circle should look upon him as a sort of Admirable Crichton and Chevalier Bayard rolled into one. An hour's chat with him was a sort of epic poem, gorgeous and highly scented; a sort of Eastern panorama and Arabian Nights' Entertainment, so much had he seen and so well could he recount his experiences. He never seemed to weary in endeavouring to divert his audience, and even

the most stupid of listeners met with the greatest consideration at his hands. Mrs. Christmas, who usually went to sleep unless her own tongue kept her awake, never yielded to slumber when Lestrange talked to her; while Maggie Primrose was absolutely fascinated by him, and would sit for an hour with her large brown eyes fastened on him, looking for all the world like some one in a dream.

It never occurred to me at that time that it might be dangerous to Tom Christmas's interests for this very brilliant young man to come so constantly to our house. And yet I might have known, if I had not been so very young and inexperienced, that Tom Christmas must suffer in comparison with Lestrange. Tom was one of the most prosaic individuals in existence, despite the fact that he had once written verses. He was so absolutely scientific, too, that he killed whatever poetic

inspiration arose within him by criticism and analysis. If anything of an emotional nature suggested itself to him his first concern was to analyse it and see from whence it sprung, so that a miracle became a process of electricity, and a rainbow the result of a natural law. What he and Maggie used to talk about in their evening perambulations I have often wondered; but Tom's favourite theme when talking with anybody was not anything that would much interest a young lady more or less romantically disposed. Moreover, he was usually a bad listener, as most great talkers generally are, and would resume his own subject at the end of his companion's remarks as if the latter had never uttered a syllable. In this respect Lestrange was sure to compare favourably with him in a lady's eyes. He was eminently poetic, and romantic, and sympathetic; he abhorred scientific methods; and was quite sentimental in his social and religious views,

whereas Tom Christmas was matter-of-fact in the one and sceptical in the other.

I suppose it was only natural that Maggie Primrose, in Tom's absence, should turn to Lestrange with something more than mere admiration. I don't remember when it was that I first noticed the change in her manner. But when two or three of the summer months had gone, and Lestrange still paid us his weekly visit, I began to notice that Maggie looked forward to his coming with unconcealed pleasure. All sorts of little signs and symptoms began to make themselves apparent to me. Now it was a new method of dressing her brown hair, now a bright ribbon or dainty apron. All innocent things enough, and yet done, consciously or unconsciously, with the idea of making herself more pleasing in the eyes of Lestrange. Other signs there were, too, the heightened colour when his knock sounded at the door, the bright blush and half-averted eyes when she gave him her hand. And yet, fool

that I was, I could not see in these things the danger-signal out against Tom Christmas. If I had been clear-sighted enough to see it, could I have done anything to avert the disaster that was coming?

CHAPTER IX.

IN HYDE PARK.

I HAD been working very hard one day, about the middle of July, chiefly because Mr. Spivey was holiday-making at Eastbourne, and Mr. McFlynn drunk in his lodgings, and at four o'clock I went away from the office resolved to do nothing further until I had had a breath of fresh air. I walked down to the river and got on board a steamboat and rode up to Westminster, from whence I made my way to Hyde Park, which is, in my opinion, the breeziest place in London, except Hampstead Heath. And there I strolled about, watching the gay carriages and fine horses, and wondering who the lady in blue was, and whether the girl in white was single or married.

The paths were just as full of pedestrians as the Row was full of carriages, and every face and figure was alike strange to me, though the types were of the usual cast. There was the country cousin staring about him with wide open eyes and mouth, and there the City swell who endeavoured to look as if to the manner born. Here was the bluff old country squire with two daughters, one on each arm, and at his elbow a Chinaman resplendent in silk, and buttons, and pig-tail. And walking along through the motley crowd, I suddenly saw two people, at sight of whom I stood still and wondered—Lestrange and Maggie Primrose.

They were standing near the rails watching the gay procession of carriages go by, and they did not see me. He was attired in the most approved style and looked very handsome and distinguished, as indeed he did at all times. But Maggie was almost beyond my recognition. She was always particularly fastidious about her

dress; but upon this occasion she had taken more than ordinary care over it. From the dainty hat to the neat shoes everything was perfect.

I had a full view of her face as I stood there watching them. She was talking and laughing gaily to Lestrange, and her pretty face was full of life and animation. I had never seen her look so bright in Tom Christmas's company.

I turned away for the moment, sick at heart. Somehow an irrepressible feeling of trouble came over me. I felt that these two had no right to be together in this way, and that Tom Christmas was being betrayed. And then I turned round again, and would have gone up to them if I had not suddenly remembered that I had no right to interfere. I was not even Maggie Primrose's brother, though I had come to look upon her as a sister. I was only the friend of Tom—and he was far away in Australia.

After a while Lestrange and Maggie moved

away, and I followed them at a distance wondering what I ought to do. I could easily have gone up and greeted them in the ordinary fashion, concealing my surprise and astonishment. But I felt it wisest not to reveal myself, and I let them go on before while I followed after. There was not much fear of losing sight of them, for Lestrange was conspicuous by his tall figure and handsome bearing, and even in that crowd of pretty and beautiful women there were few more graceful han Maggie Primrose.

I followed them away from the crowd and across the Park towards the Marble Arch. They were evidently in the closest sympathy, and I began to think that these walks must have been going on for some time. I noted everything as I followed them. Once beneath a tree they paused, and I could see that Lestrange was talking quickly and earnestly, and that Maggie was listening in silence with averted eyes and downcast head. And then they went

on again and I followed them into Oxford Street, where Lestrange put Maggie into a hansom and she drove away. I watched him light a cigar and turn back into the Park, and then I went back to the City and wondered what to do.

It was late that night when I returned home, and I found Maggie alone, Mrs. Christmas having gone out to tea two doors away. I suppose I was very silent and gloomy during the evening, and more than once I saw Maggie glance at me as if she did not altogether understand my quiet mood.

"You are very quiet to-night, Len," she said at length, "and you look as if something troubles you."

"I am tired and have a bad headache, Maggie," I answered. "My head has ached badly all day. It was so bad this afternoon that I was obliged to leave the office and go out for some fresh air."

"And where did you go, Len?"

"Hyde Park."

I tried this direct shot with the view of seeing what effect it would have upon her. But, unprepared as she must have been, it produced very little. She merely bent her head a little closer over her work and made no answer.

"The Park was very full this afternoon," I continued. "And do you know, Maggie, I thought I saw two people there whom I did not expect to see."

She looked up quickly then and coloured slightly.

"Indeed, Len. And who were they?"

"You and Lestrange, Maggie."

She bent her head over her work again and went on with it for a minute or two before replying.

"Quite right, Len," she said at last. "You did see us. I had been to Knightsbridge, and I met Mr. Lestrange near the Park. He

walked through the Park with me, and was kind enough to send me home in a cab."

What could I say? The explanation was satisfactory enough to satisfy any one, and I had no right to mention the scene under the tree, nor to ask if she had ever met Lestrange before under similar circumstances. I took up a book and began to read, and presently Maggie sat down at Mrs. Christmas's desk and commenced writing a letter. She used to write to Tom Christmas every week.

Lestrange did not come to see us for some weeks after this occurrence, and I began to hope that he had gone abroad again. Nothing would have pleased me better than to hear that he had left England for good. I was so anxious to hear something of him that I once or twice went to a few places where I thought I should be likely to find him if he was in London. But I saw nothing of him.

During those few weeks, Maggie went on

in much the same way as usual. She went about her housekeeping duties and took care of Mrs. Christmas, and wrote her letter to Tom Christmas every week. She was quiet and content enough now to all appearance, and had evidently quite got over Tom's departure. And seeing her calm demeanour I gradually lost all fears about Lestrange, and did not mention the matter to Tom when I next wrote to him, as I had once thought of doing.

September came, and early in the month we received a letter from Tom Christmas which contained no end of good news. He was succeeding beyond all his anticipations in the business which had taken him out, and he believed that Mr. Spivey would be more than satisfied. He hoped to return home by the beginning of November, and to be married about three weeks later. He had not the least doubt that Mr. Spivey would materially increase his salary, and he begged Maggie to make her pre-

parations for the wedding, as it was quite possible that Mr. Spivey might request Tom to take up his permanent residence in Melbourne as manager of the business there.

Once upon a time this letter would have given Maggie Primrose all manner of pleasurable anticipations; but now it fell flat. She read it quietly enough and gave it to Tom's mother and then to me. Tom Christmas's love-letters were such as any one could read. There was neither sentiment nor poetry in them, but they were straightforward and practical, and true and honest. I went away to the City that morning, wishing that Tom Christmas could return at once and marry Maggie and take her away with him. And I hoped ardently that Lestrange would not appear on the scene again before Tom's return.

That afternoon I was coming past Charing Cross Station, and remembering that I wished to get something from the bookstall inside, I went in and walked down the platform. The

tidal train was just about leaving, and I lingered watching the heavy-cloaked and coated passengers as they came along the platform. And then, just as suddenly as I had seen her in the Park, I saw Maggie Primrose coming towards me. She recognised me at the same moment, and she did not stop or falter, but came directly towards me. She was very pale, and there were unshed tears in her eyes; but her face was resolute and determined.

"Maggie!" I cried. "What brings you here? Where are you going?"

"I am going away, Len. I am——"

"Going away? Oh, Maggie! What does it mean?"

She looked round her and bit her lips. A porter carrying a portmanteau came up, and placing it in a carriage, signalled to her to come across and take the place he had reserved for her. She nodded to him, and turning round to me began to speak quickly.

"It means, Len, that I am going away, and that you will not see me again. I thought I should have got away without your knowing it. Leonard, listen. When you go home to-night, look in your desk. You will find two letters, one for yourself, and one for—for Tom."

"For Tom?"

I thought she would break down then, but she controlled herself, and went on again:

"For Tom, Len. Send it to him, and ask him to—to forgive me and forget me. Oh, Len, it must seem bad, wicked, dreadful conduct, this of mine! I can't help it. I have tried, oh, so very hard to be true to him, and I can't, I can't."

"Maggie, tell me what you are going to do?"

"I am going to be married, Len."

"Married? You, Maggie? And to whom?"

"To Mr. Lestrange."

I said no more, but stood before her silent and surprised beyond measure.

"I have told Tom everything in my letter, Leonard. You will send it to him at once, will you not? And now, good-bye, Len, and oh, thank you so many, many times for——"

She began to cry then, and I found my tongue.

"Maggie," I said, and I never tried to put so much persuasion into my voice before or since, "Maggie, for Heaven's sake, stop! Think of what you are doing? Where is Lestrange? If you are going to marry him, why not in the proper way? Why are you going away like this? Why is he not with you?"

"He is ill, in Paris," she said. "We are to be married there to-morrow morning. Let me go, now, Len, and try to think kindly of me sometimes."

"Let me go with you, Maggie. Nay, I will go."

"No, Leonard, no, please! He would be so angry. See, I will write to you to-morrow morning."

I shook my head. There was something that I did not like about it. I stood wondering what to do. Should I follow her and see that all was right? While I hesitated, the bell rang, and a porter coming up, told Maggie that she must take her seat.

"You hear, Len—I must go. Won't you say good-bye to me?"

"God bless you, Maggie," I said, "wherever you go. But oh, my dear, this will kill Tom."

She turned paler than ever when I said that, and put her hand to her breast as if in pain. And then the look of resolution came back to her, and she got into the carriage and drew down her veil, and the train steamed away, and left me standing there like a man in a dream.

How I got out of the station, I hardly remember. I have confused recollections of swearing at Lestrange, and feeling that I should like to kill him. Then I think I cried, and after that

laughed savagely, and vowed that every woman living was false and fickle. And then, although I had some very important business awaiting me in the City, I hailed a cab and went home to Canonbury Square.

Mrs. Christmas was sitting in calm repose by the fire, reading one of the novels which Lestrange had brought Maggie. She was very fond of light reading, but her daughter Julia had given her little chance of getting any during her *régime*. She looked placidly at me as I entered, and hardly expressed any surprise at my unusually early appearance. Miss Primrose, she said, had gone away that day to visit some friends, and had left instructions with Sarah Ann about things in general. An easy-going, even-tempered woman was Mrs. Christmas.

I went to the old desk in the corner and raised the lid. Yes, there lay the two letters she had spoken of, side by side, with the brief inscriptions, "Leonard" and "Tom," on the envelopes. And

on the one marked "Tom," there was a great tear-stain.

I went upstairs to my own room, and read the letter addressed to myself. It was very brief, and it told me little more than Maggie had already told me herself. But reading between the lines I could see how absolutely fascinated the poor girl had been by Lestrange, and how, as soon as he put forth his power, she had yielded to his persuasions and renounced her allegiance to an incomparably better man. I could trace something of the struggle that had gone on in Maggie's heart before she finally gave way; I could see what she had suffered in thinking about Tom Christmas's disappointment. And I could also see something else—that she had come to regard Lestrange as a demi-god, and had lost her heart to him as she never could have lost it to plain Tom Christmas.

I was obliged to go back to the office, and I carried the letter for Tom with me, thinking that

I would write to him that night and tell him everything, though I little knew how to find words in which to convey my message. But on second thoughts, I decided to wait a day or two in order that I might be able to tell him that Maggie was married to Lestrange. She had promised to write to me, and I knew that she would keep her promise if she could possibly do so.

I thought anxiously over the whole unfortunate business that evening, and lay awake most of the night still thinking of it. The more I considered it, the less I liked the look of it. Why had Lestrange not come a-wooing in straightforward fashion? Why, if he loved Maggie Primrose, had he not been brave enough to say so to others instead of letting her steal away from us in so clandestine a manner? And why was the wedding to take place in Paris, when it might have easily been celebrated in a score of quiet City churches? The only ray of light I

could get was the few words which Maggie had dropped about Lestrange's illness. It might be that he was ill in some Parisian hotel, and had sent for her so that she could nurse him. There was some comfort in the thought, and I tried to gain courage from it.

How I lived through the next day I don't know. I could not eat or sit still, and I dare say that everybody with whom I came in contact thought I was going crazy. I was totally unfit for business as for everything else. I passed the evening in hearing Mrs. Christmas talk, and never did hours seem to drag so slowly or that good lady's tongue to wag so quickly. And that night I slept, being fairly worn out with anxiety.

And while I slept I dreamed. I was on a great promontory, and it was dark midnight, and beneath me the sea boiled and surged in mad fury, and overhead lightning flashed and thunder roared. And through all the wild devilry of the

scene, I saw a little white dove fluttering, beaten this way and that, and never able to make headway against the tempest. Now it was dashed upwards by the angry wind, and now a fiercer gust caught it and whirled it far out to sea. And then, while I watched it, the tempest subsided, and the white dove, weary and worn, fluttered to the great rock on which I stood, and hid itself in the cleft. And then I awoke.

And again I slept and dreamed. I saw again the rocky promontory and the sea beneath. I saw the sea with the morning sun upon it, and it looked fair and gracious. There was scarcely a ripple upon it, and its emerald waters shone with light. I saw the white dove fly out across it, and sail far away towards the sunlighted east. And while I watched, the skies grew dark and the winds began to blow, and hail and rain came down, and the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled from north to south, and the white dove, far away from the shadow of the rock, was

beaten and baffled, and sank down amongst the angry waves—lost. And I awoke once more.

And once more I slept and once more I dreamed. I saw the ocean again, fair and beautiful, and the light which lighted it was neither of sun nor moon nor star. And in the midst of it lay an island like a great pearl set in a silver sea, and on it I saw the white dove, calm, happy, and at rest. And I woke again and it was morning, and the autumn sunlight was flooding my window with light.

I lost little time that morning in getting away to the City. I expected that Maggie's letter would go to the office and not to the house. It was with a beating heart that I inquired of Jones if there were any letters for me. Yes, said Jones, there was one on my table with the Paris post-mark.

I tore it open and glanced at the signature. *Margaret Lestrange.* Then she was married, and my vague fears were groundless. Thank God!

I sat down and read the brief note. She had seized the opportunity, she said, of writing to me while her husband was out, making arrangements for leaving Paris. They had been married that morning, she said, and they were going away during the day, first to Italy, then to Egypt, and afterwards to India. They would probably go round the world before returning home. And then the letter concluded abruptly.

I wrote my letter to Tom Christmas that night, sitting in his little attic-study at home. How I did it I don't know; but I do remember that, when I had finished, I put my head on my arms and cried like a child to think of the pain and grief that good, honest fellow must endure when he came to read it. I would cheerfully have undergone the most exquisite tortures rather than have written that letter, if such a vicarious atonement would have done any good. But I knew that he must hear the bad news sooner or later, and I also knew that no one could break

it so gently or considerately as I. I had come to be almost a part of himself, and I understood and loved him as no one else in this world did. And so I forced myself to write the letter, and finished the task and enclosed Maggie's note and despatched it, and wondered how Tom Christmas would feel when it reached him, and told him that his dearest hopes were shattered.

It was necessary that I should inform Julia of what had happened, and I was wondering whether a call or a letter would be the most fitting means of doing so, when I noticed a paragraph in the daily papers which informed the world that the Bishop of Grandchester and Mrs. Dumbury were in town for a few days. So I attired myself in my best and went the next morning to Grandchester House, where I found the prelate's lady busy with his lordship's chaplain and sundry other ecclesiastics. I think she saw that I had news of moment to communicate, for she gave me a private audience at once.

I told her, in brief terms, that Maggie had gone away from us and had since been married.

"And pray, Leonard Tempest, who is the man that Maggie Primrose has married, and why have they behaved in such an underhand fashion?"

"The man, Mrs. Dumbury, is Frank Lestrange."

"Frank Lestrange! Impossible! Impossible!"

"It is true, Mrs. Dumbury. Why are you so surprised?"

"Surprised, Leonard Tempest, surprised? Are you a fool or an idiot?"

"I don't know," I replied, lamely. "I believe I soon shall be mad though, with a little more anxiety."

"If you knew all that I know, Leonard Tempest, of Frank Lestrange, you would not ask why I am surprised. He marry? Never!"

I remembered the scene in Lestrange's chambers, and that he had told Julia that he would never marry. His air of certainty had

impressed me strongly at the time, and it came back to me now with much force. Why had I not remembered it sooner? I sat staring stupidly at Julia Dumbury.

"No," she continued, "Frank Lestrange would never *marry* that little simpleton. He is deceiving her. She is not the first woman that he has deceived and wronged, Leonard Tempest. He is a *roué*, a libertine, a liar."

She spoke with such vehemence that I was too much amazed to reply. What mystery lay hid behind her words?

"But, Mrs. Dumbury, Maggie herself tells me they are married. See, here is the letter."

"Fiddle-de-dee, Leonard Tempest. You are, after all, only a baby. Did it never occur to you that marriage, or what looked like marriage, was the only way in which Lestrange could overcome the girl's scruples? Why, of course they would go through some form, and she would fancy it was the real thing. I tell you I *know*

Frank Lestrange. He will make much of his new toy for a while, and she will live in a fool's paradise. And then——"

"And then? What, Mrs. Dumbury?"

"And then she will wake from her dream, Leonard Tempest, and find that Frank Lestrange has deceived and ruined her, and that he will cast her away like an old glove or a faded flower."

CHAPTER X.

A LETTER FROM FRANCE.

I WENT away from Grandchester House feeling more miserable than when I entered it. Julia Dumbury's vehement denunciation of Lestrange filled me with all manner of sorrowful anticipations. If he was really all that she proclaimed him, then indeed Maggie was not safe in his hands. But was Mrs. Dumbury right? I remembered the little scene in Jermyn Street, the expression on her face, almost vindictive and certainly not boding any good to Lestrange. I remembered also the burning of the flowers and letters, and the passionate way in which she kissed both before committing them to the flames. She had evidently been deeply in love with Lestrange, and I had heard

that women whose love is rejected very often transform their affection into hatred. After all, then, her denunciation of Lestrange might arise from spiteful feeling and not from fact. I took heart at that and resolved to trouble Julia Dumbury no longer. I had done what I could, and now I must wait until Tom came home. It would be my task to comfort him.

The weeks went slowly by and things jogged on in pretty much the same way with us in Canonbury Square. Mrs. Christmas, having made up her mind that Maggie was going to make a lengthy stop with her friends in the country, assumed the reins of government, and succeeded beyond my expectations, though I believe that Sarah Ann, who had been well-trained by Julia, was responsible in no small degree for the order and decorum of our household. I never mentioned Maggie to Mrs. Christmas, and that good lady never spoke of her to me, except to remark now and then that Miss Primrose was making a long

stay, and would probably get her friends to help her with the wedding clothes.

About six weeks after Maggie went away I said farewell to Mr. Spivey's establishment for ever. Somehow I had not felt at home there after Tom Christmas went away. I grew more and more tired of Mr. Spivey and his surroundings. Certain small differences arose between us on the question of salary. Mr. Spivey discovered that I, in my own spare time, had been so base as to contribute articles of a frivolous nature to certain of the weekly papers, and remarked that any product of my pen ought to have been handed over to Mr. McFlynn for the benefit of that gentleman's journal. I replied that I should be glad, indeed, to contribute to Mr. McFlynn's columns providing that he, Mr. Spivey, would remunerate me in a fitting manner—a remark which brought clouds to Spivey's brow, and many "hums" and "hahs" to his tongue. He thought that I was already well paid, my "wage" being a

very good one. I answered that I had lately often earned more by a single evening's work than by a long week's toil in his employ, and hinted that it was time I saw something in the shape of an increased salary. At which audacious proposal Mr. Spivey grew apoplectic, and said that there were hundreds of deserving young people who would gladly take my place at a smaller "wage." There was only one answer to that statement. I placed my resignation in Mr. Spivey's hands and left him the next week, determined henceforth to do anything in the way of hack-work, but never again to put my neck under the yoke of a little cad. *Vale* Spivey.

So the office in Paternoster Row knew me no more. I took a little room in Fleet Street and began to write for the dailies, and weeklies, and monthlies. Heavens! what hard work it was, and what a tremendous number of people seemed to be at it. Paragraphs, articles, "jokes," tales, comic poems—all these I manufactured and some-

times sold. I wrote penny novels and even a shilling shocker, and somehow kept my head above water quite as well as when I drudged at Spivey's. Very often Mr. McFlynn came panting up the dingy stairs to my dingier room, and asked me to write him a column or two, taking care to be free with Dukes and Duchesses, and not forgetting that a blank or a few asterisks were wonderfully enlivening. And at first Mr. Jones used to appear daily with a very humble request from Mr. Spivey that I would please enlighten him on some point of office work with which I was specially familiar, and about which no one else knew anything. I used to take a savage, an almost fiendish delight in making my late employer pay through the nose for these services, and charged him half-a-guinea per hour whenever he sent me work which no one else could do. I was overjoyed to find that Spivey often paid me twice as much in this way for a few hours' work as he would have paid me for a whole week's labour

under the old conditions. Penny wise and pound foolish Spivey!

I looked out anxiously for a letter from Tom Christmas. I was anxious to know how he had taken the bad news. I knew how much he had loved Maggie Primrose, and dreaded the shock that he must experience on opening my letter. I almost feared lest he should come home by the next steamer and seek Lestrange out and kill him. But I soon remembered that Tom Christmas was not of the man-slaying order, and that he would be much more likely to kill his own hopes than to murder the man who had helped to destroy them!

At last the letter came. Going down one morning to my solitary breakfast—Mrs. Christmas invariably took her first meal in the privacy of her own apartment—I found it lying by my plate and feared to open it. I let it lie there, and tried to eat. But the first mouthful choked me, and I took it up, and tore away the thin envelope, and read it resolutely through.

He was stunned, but not killed. It had been a heavy blow, he said, but he was thankful that Maggie had found out her mistake before it was too late. He hoped that she would be happy, and that she would not allow her happiness to be marred by any thoughts of him. He thought it best not to reply to the letter she had sent him through me, but he asked me to tell her if I saw her again that his one wish was for her happiness.

In all the letter there was no mention of Lestrange. There was no outburst of fury, none of the "It was thou, mine own particular friend," style which is so common in melodrama and fiction. Tom Christmas was a man for facts, and he accepted his sweetheart's faithlessness as a fact, and said no more.

The letter went on to tell me about his own plans. He had lately received a communication, he said, from Mr. Spivey, who was delighted with the way in which he had so far executed his commission; and desired him to remain in

Melbourne a few months longer, so that he could find a responsible manager, and indoctrinate him in the ways of the Spivey establishment. Accordingly, said Tom, it would be spring before he returned home again. When he did come back, he concluded, he should settle down at his own post and let the daily round and common task satisfy him for the remainder of his days.

So that was all, and I was somewhat relieved, and felt that Tom Christmas had borne the shock like a man. And yet I would much rather he had flown into a passion and sworn a little, and thrown out hints about the frailty of woman, and generally thrown off steam, than that he should have exhibited so much fortitude and resignation. For I knew that the human heart and the steam-boiler are, after all, very much alike—they must either open the escape-valve or burst.

I was very busy during the winter that immediately followed, and I was glad to be so;

for otherwise I should have felt lonely and companionless. I began once or twice to regret the old days when Julia was with us; for, bigot as she was, she was still much livelier company than Mrs. Christmas, whose sole idea of conversation was that she should talk and every one else listen. I looked forward to Tom's return, and remembered with a sigh that he must be changed. Change, change, there was little else but change on every side.

It was nearly April. The crocuses and snowdrops in the parks were already bright and fresh in the trim flower-beds; the spring sun was warm and cheery in Piccadilly; the great folks were beginning to come back to town, and everything in London seemed busier and brighter. I had had a hard winter, and I welcomed the change. I only wanted Tom Christmas back to be quite content with my lot. I looked forward to greeting him, to cheering him up, to having him back to our old studies, to hearing him talk,

to arguing with him, to telling him all that I had done in his absence. I had heard from him about the end of February, and he told me I might expect to see him about the middle of April. And while I was making ready for his coming, and considering what I could best do to hide away the sorrow that I felt on his account, there came news—news of Maggie. I knew it was bad news as soon as I saw the letter. It was lying waiting for me when I went home one night. Mrs. Christmas was enjoying the honour of a month's visit at Grandchester Palace, and a sister of Mrs. Migson's was keeping house in her stead. And so there was no one with me when I took up my missive of sorrow.

It was a thin, foreign-looking envelope, addressed in flowing female characters to Monsieur Leonard Tempest, and it bore a French postmark. I had no friends or relations in France. It must contain news of Maggie.

I tore it open, and found a large, thin sheet of paper, closely written on all four sides. The letter was in English, and the handwriting clear and pretty, although the writer had chosen to cross the lines instead of taking a new sheet. I glanced at the signature; it was unknown to me. I sat down, and began to read the long epistle with as much patience as I could command.

"THE CONVENT OF OUR LADY OF MERCY,
"FONTRENELLE, VILLEFRANCHE,
"*25th March*, 187–.

"MONSIEUR,

"At the desire of our Reverend Mother Superior, I write to inform you that we have at this present moment a young lady staying in our House who is very ill, and with whose friends we should like to communicate if it be in any way possible. The reason why I am addressing you, monsieur, is briefly this: we found in the young lady's pocket a small book in which was entered the name and address which

I shall write on the cover of this letter. There were no other letters or papers, and though the young lady's linen is marked with the letters M. P., we could gain no clue from that as to her identity or address. And as it is very probable, monsieur, that she will never regain consciousness, we judge it well to write to you at once, in the hope that you may prove to be her brother or friend, or that you may even help us to place ourselves in communication with our patient's family. And in order that you may understand all about the matter, our Reverend Mother instructs me, monsieur, to tell you all that we know of this unfortunate young lady for whose sad fate we have all so much of pity.

"You must know, monsieur, that this village of Fontrenelle, which is about three leagues from Villefranche, is somewhat celebrated for its rural air and surroundings, and that tourists come here now and then, and stay at the hotel of the 'Three Swans.' It is not a large hotel, monsieur;

but then the village is a very small one, and the tourists only come in small numbers as yet, the fame of Fontrenelle not having penetrated much beyond our own department, and there being so many more places which are better worth visiting.

"To the 'Three Swans,' monsieur, there came about three weeks or a month ago a gentleman and lady, who engaged the best suite of rooms, and appeared rich and prosperous. The gentleman was tall, and very handsome and distinguished in appearance, and gave his orders like one who has been accustomed to obedience all his life. The lady was young and pretty, and very graceful, monsieur, and spoke kindly to all who approached her. She had beautiful brown eyes and hair, and her face was one which you could not help admiring, so winning an expression did it wear. And yet sometimes, Madame Pierrot, the good landlady of the 'Three Swans,' tells me, she looked sad and

troubled, and there was an expression of much sorrow in her face.

"These two, monsieur, were English; but the gentleman spoke French perfectly, and with the real Parisian accent, while the lady spoke it not quite so well. They did not give their names at the hotel, and, when they first came, the husband told Master Pierrot that he could not say how long they would remain, but probably until they grew tired of Fontrenelle. He was very particular, this distinguished-looking gentleman, that his apartments should be situated in the most retired part of the house, and he was accustomed to remain up late at night, writing at a large desk, while madame sat near him, and worked or read.

"It was easy to see, I suppose, that the young lady adored her husband. Madame Pierrot tells me, monsieur, that never did she see such absolute devotion. Alas! I fear that her love was returned but slightly, monsieur, and that the so-

handsome gentleman was cold of heart. Nay, he must have been heartless, or he would have loved his wife with a devotion equal to that which she showed him. *Mon Dieu!* if you could but see her, monsieur, as she now lies, like a beautiful lily on her bed in this chamber where I now write.

"When these two, then, had lived at the 'Three Swans' about ten days, monsieur, it was noticed that there was some trouble between the handsome gentleman and the young lady. He was gloomy and morose; she wept much and remained in her own apartment, no longer taking pleasure in walking about our little village or conversing with its inhabitants. Also, Madame Pierrot tells me, there were words passed between the two which should not be used by husband and wife. Occasionally, too, Madame Pierrot overheard mutual upbraiding and recrimination, and after such scenes monsieur would go away from the hotel and remain on the hills until nightfall,

and madame would remain in her room and weep in solitude. So that you see, monsieur, it was not all sunshine with these two.

"About a week ago, then, the troubles of madame approached a crisis. I had occasion, monsieur, to visit the 'Three Swans,' and, on arriving there, I found my friend Madame Pierrot in a state of agitation. The handsome gentleman and the sweet young lady were quarrelling; behold, I could hear it for myself, for Madame Pierrot had conducted me into an apartment adjoining theirs. And indeed I could overhear much of what was said, monsieur, for I can speak the English sufficiently well, having spent six years in a house of our Order in London. And, oh, monsieur, the words that I overheard were sad indeed. The young lady accused the handsome gentleman of *ennui*, of *ennui* caused by herself. She said that he was tired of her, disappointed in her and I know not what. Monsieur, it was easy to perceive that the poor thing

passionately loved him, and that she expected him to love her in the same way. And when he answered nothing, she upbraided him still more. And then, oh, monsieur, he began to speak, so coldly and calmly, and with such exquisite cruelty. He said yes, they had made a mistake, but it could yet be repaired. It was very evident, he said, that they were not suited to each other, and they had therefore better separate. To which, monsieur, she replied very properly that the marriage-tie can be dissolved by no man, and that she had meant her vows. And then—oh, it frightens me yet to think of, monsieur! he laughed, and said that the marriage was nothing, that it was not a marriage at all, in fact, and that they were both free. 'The marriage nothing?' she cried.' 'My God! it is not possible that you have so cruelly deceived me.' 'Not only possible but certain,' he said, coolly. 'It was a mock ceremony. And now I have had enough of this; let us have an understanding and a settlement.'

But she, monsieur, answered him never a word, only we heard her give a low moan as if in pain, and a sound as though she had sunk down upon the floor. And then monsieur came out of the room and bade Madame Pierrot go to the young lady, and we went in and found her lying on the floor like one dead.

"We sent for the doctor, monsieur, and he shook his head, and asked if madame had not just had a great shock. He told us that she would probably be ill a long time; and, when I heard that, I ran quickly and told our Reverend Mother all the circumstances, and she returned with me, and we had the poor young lady removed to the convent, so that she might be quieter than she could have been at the 'Three Swans.' And there, monsieur, she has lain ever since, and consciousness has not yet returned to her, though this is the sixth day.

"As for monsieur, no one in Fontrenelle has seen him since. He did not return to the hotel,

and he has sent no word. Only we hear that one answering his description left Villefranche for the south on the evening of the sad day, and we fancy him to have been the missing one.

"And now, monsieur, if you are a relation or friend of this unhappy young lady's, will you not come to her? Alas! it is very probable that she will die, for Dr. Cherbuliez looks more grave each time he comes to visit her. But, think, monsieur, if she should return to consciousness for a few moments, how pleasing to her to find one at her bedside whom she has known in happier days! Oh, monsieur, if you could but see her, as I see her now, looking so fair and fragile, your heart would indeed be melted. Perhaps, monsieur, I am addressing one whom this unfortunate one has wronged? If it be so, forgive her, for His sake who died for all of us poor sinners. And remember, monsieur, that if she has sinned she has also suffered, and that

for her as for Mary Magdalene our good Lord has mercy and compassion.

"Receive, Monsieur, etc.,

"SISTER GUDULE,

"OF THE CROSS AND PASSION."

The good nun's letter dropped at my feet, and if she had let a tear fall on it while she wrote, I too had added to the tear-stains while I read. Poor Maggie! Poor little primrose, torn and broken by the cruel winds of life! Yes, I would go to her. If she was going to die she should see an old friend's face by her bedside. I would go at once. And woe be to Frank Lestrange if he crossed my path.

I sprang up intent on packing a bag and hurrying away by the night mail to Paris. As my hand was on the door I heard a footstep in the hall whose sound sent the blood throbbing to my heart. I opened the door and saw Tom Christmas.

He looked older, his hair was shot with gray, and he had grown a beard. But it was the same kind smile, the same warm clasp of the hand, the same affectionate tone. Alas! what sorrow he had come home to!

I led him to a chair, and not trusting myself to speak, put the nun's letter into his hands and then turned away while he read it. It seemed a long time before he folded it up and spoke.

"You were going to her, Len?"

"Yes, Tom."

He picked up the bag which he laid down when he entered, and buttoned his coat again.

"Come," he said, "let us go." And we left the house together.

CHAPTER XI.

OUR LADY OF MERCY.

We travelled all that night and all next day, and passed a considerable portion of the next night in waiting at a small junction between Paris and Villefranche. And all through the long, weary hours Tom Christmas spoke little. He sat silent and solitary in the corner of the carriage, or paced up and down the various platforms. Never once did he close his eyes in sleep. And I began to watch him closely at last, fearful lest his reason should give way under the strain which those terrible hours were putting upon it. I tried to induce him to talk; but my endeavours were all in vain. He sat looking straight before him with eyes that noted

nothing of the scenery through which we were passing. And sometimes he took the nun's letter from his pocket and read it through again. And when he did that, there was an expression in his eyes which was terrible to see.

Villefranche at last, in the early morning sunlight. How far away was Fontrenelle? Fontrenelle was three leagues. Did monsieur desire to go there with his friend? Ah, then, monsieur must hire a conveyance, of which they had the most noble at the "Rayon d'Or" in the square, with the most reasonable of charges and attentive of drivers. So we proceeded to the posting establishment and hired a carriage, and were quickly bowling along the highway, bloused and sabotted peasants peeping over the hedges at us as we sped along. And at last the driver cried to me to behold; and I looked, and saw a little white-walled village nestling in the valley beneath us. Ten minutes more, and we were in its midst. Yes, here was the "Three Swans," and that must

be Madame Pierrot standing in the old-fashioned doorway. The driver would have stopped here, but Tom told him to drive onward; and he whipped up his horses, and drove us to the outer gate of the Convent of Our Lady of Mercy. It was a plain, gray-walled building, shut in by trees and shrubs, and with the little village church peeping through a grove of trees on the further side. A peaceful place to any one, but especially so to us, who still heard the great world's noise ringing in our ears.

An old woman, clothed in a rough brown habit, came to the outer gate, and looked through a little wicket at us. I told her that we wished to see Sister Gudule or the Reverend Mother, on hearing which she hobbled away, and left us waiting outside. There we stood for five minutes, watching the carriage go slowly down the road to the inn, and being stared at by a group of tiny peasant children who had gathered round to examine us. Then came steps across the

flagged courtyard inside—firmer, more decisive steps—not those of the old woman who had peered at us through the wicket. There is a jingling of keys, a drawing of bolts; the door opens, and a buxom, pleasant-faced woman motions us to enter, and points us to a door across the courtyard, where stands a figure in the black garments of a nun. This is Sister Gudule. She is tall, and of intelligent countenance, and there are traces of tears on her pale face. She comes a step forward to meet us, and we raise our hats to her.

"I am Leonard Tempest, madame."

"Welcome, monsieur, and a thousand thanks for your so-speedy answer to my letter. Come this way; indeed, I am glad to see you."

She led us along a little corridor, and into a small reception-room where there were two or three chairs, and some religious pictures, and a crucifix, and one or two books. She motions us to be seated, and closes the door.

"Madame, we are very anxious, very anxious indeed. We have travelled day and night to get here."

"You are the brothers of madame, then, monsieur?"

"We have been more than brothers, madame. This gentleman was to have married her—once. The man who deceived her was his friend."

The nun turned her soft eyes on Tom Christmas with compassionate interest. She saw the trouble in his face.

"Tell me how she is," he said. "Tell me everything."

"Monsieur, we must all die. Our patient is with God."

"Dead?"

"She died yesterday, monsieur. It was at noon."

He just covered his face with his hands for an instant, and then he sat down. I went and stood by him, and took his hand in mine, and said nothing; but I knew he would understand.

"It was at noon," said Sister Gudule. "We knew it was coming, for Dr. Cherbuliez had told us that she could not live. She was conscious before the end came, and I told her that I had written to you, Monsieur Tempest. She smiled and said that you would come, she knew you would; and if she was dead, I was to tell you that she asked every one to forgive her, and that she hoped you would all forget her, and be as happy as in the old days. And she asked me, monsieur, to tell you that she had been justly punished for her wicked treatment of a good man, whose forgiveness she implored. And soon after that, monsieur, she kissed me, and thanked me for the little I had been privileged to do for her, and said she would go to sleep. And when I next looked at her, monsieur, she was dead."

The good Sister was weeping as she concluded, and more than one tear had fallen from my own eyes while she spoke. But Tom Christmas sat

dry-eyed, with that terrible expression still on his face.

"You must be fatigued and weary," said Sister Gudule presently. "Let me offer you some refreshment, gentlemen."

"We are very tired," I replied; "but I do not think we could eat just now. Can we not see her, madame?"

I knew that Tom would like to see the poor dead girl again. And as all power of speech seemed to have left him, I was obliged to speak for him. He pressed my hand when I spoke, and looked eagerly at the nun.

"But certainly," said Sister Gudule. "Shall it be now, monsieur? Then this way."

We followed her along the corridor. She unlocked a door at the extreme end, and laid her hand on a heavy curtain which hung inside. But before she could draw it aside and enter, Tom Christmas spoke:

"Stay," he said. "Only myself at first. I must be alone."

She held the curtain back and let him enter, looking at him the while with compassionate eyes. Then she softly closed the door and retired to a little recess along the corridor where she stood with clasped hands, praying, no doubt, as women will, for the man who seemed so sorely stricken. It seemed an age to me, the half-hour that Tom spent in that little room. I paced up and down the corridor and wondered if he would never come. I could hear no sound, though I listened anxiously at the door. My own nerves had become so excited that I could almost fancy the scene inside.

At last he came. The Sister and I looked at him, though it cost us both an effort to do so, for his grief seemed almost sacred. But when I saw his face, I saw that the bitterness of his sorrow was over. His eyes were still dry and bright, and there was that fixed look of determination upon his face which had made me so uneasy. But in spite of that he looked better,

and his voice had got back some of its old ring when he spoke.

"Go in, Len," he said, "go in, and say good-bye to Maggie. You have never seen her look so beautiful as she does now."

I went in, Sister Gudule following me. I had never been in a death-chamber before, and I was filled with many conflicting thoughts as I lifted the heavy curtain aside and passed into the mysterious presence.

I raised my head. Yes, there she lay, still, motionless, without a breath. But was this death? Nay, she had fallen in a quiet sleep, and would presently wake, and the sweet smile which even now lingered on her lips would deepen as she saw us watching her. Oh, not death, not death—for death is terrible, and this had nothing terrible in it!

No, she had never seemed so beautiful as now. All care and trouble had gone from the dead face, and only peace remained. It seemed

as if some vision of peace had dawned on her before the end came, and left its impress on the calm forehead and smiling lips. Her beautiful brown hair fell curling over her shoulders; her hands were clasped across the still bosom. There were flowers everywhere, flowers which had not yet blossomed in our cold England, but were smiling in every garden of this sunny France.

And some kind hand had laid at her feet a bunch of golden primroses.

As I stood there and looked at her, and noted the simple contents of the little room, the snowy linen, the old-fashioned furniture, the crucifix and pictures hanging above the bed, my mind went back to the days when we had first known her. We had always loved her, she was so sweet, and gentle, and kind. I thought of the days when we all used to walk into the City together, she pleased to hear Tom Christmas talk, and looking at him with love beaming from her brown eyes. I thought of the quiet evenings

when she used to sing to us. In days to come we should think of them and long, how ardently and unavailingly, for their return. Yes, nothing could be again that had been. She was dead.

"Is she not beautiful, monsieur? Somehow, I cannot think her dead. I have stolen in here so often to-day to look at her. Ah, what a great sorrow for him outside there!"

I bent my head; speak I could not in that little room. It seemed to me as if we were, for the moment, in another world.

We went out again and joined Tom Christmas, and I pressed his hand in mine, and in that hand-clasp we once more strengthened a friendship which nothing can ever break.

"Monsieur," said Sister Gudule, looking diffidently at me, "we have thought that she might lie in our little graveyard outside here. It is a pretty place, monsieur. There are flowers, and trees, and a fountain, and in summer the

nightingales sing there every evening. But if you wish otherwise, monsieur——?"

"No," said Tom Christmas, "let her be buried here where she has found such good friends. May we see the place?"

She took us out into the tiny cemetery. It was, indeed, an ideal resting-place. Flowers grew on every side, and the trees were in full leaf. They had already prepared a grave under the shadow of an old yew-tree, and the same hands which had decked the room with flowers, had lined the grave with moss and roses.

"We had arranged for the burial to take place this evening," said the Sister. "The Curé was to come after vespers, monsieur. But now we will do what monsieur pleases."

We told her that everything she proposed was good to us, and that we were only too anxious to show our gratitude for the good Sister's kindness. And then, promising to return in the evening, I took Tom away to the little

inn and succeeded in making him eat some food, and after that I got him to sleep. And he slept soundly, for he had not closed his eyes since leaving London.

It was six o'clock when we went back to the convent, and the bells of the little church and the convent chapel were ringing the Angelus. Sister Gudule again received us.

"You would like to see her again, gentlemen? We have carried her into the chapel and there is no one there."

We followed her along the quiet corridors into the little chapel. The altar was hung with black and lighted with many candles, and before it, on a bier, she lay with the flowers still clustered about her. The nun turned back the covering from the quiet face. Tom Christmas stooped down and kissed the calm forehead.

"Good-bye, my dear," he said, just as if she had been alive, and he bidding her farewell for an hour or a day. "Kiss her, Len. She loved you, too."

I bent my head and kissed her, and then for the first time recognised that she was really dead, and that we should never see her or speak to her again. I took Tom's arm and we went and sat down in a remote corner of the chapel, and presently two more nuns came in and put the lid on the simple coffin, and placed a large pall over it. And then the whole of the community entered two and two, and the Superior last of all, and they sang the solemn office for the dead, and we two sat and listened to the sweet voices and felt comforted.

And then, when the last notes had died away, four nuns took up the bier and went out, the others following, and Tom Christmas and I walking behind them. And outside the chapel we were met by the old priest and two boys, and they went before the bier with candle, and incense, and holy water, reciting the Psalms in the holy Latin tongue. And there in the little convent cemetery they laid her in the flower-lined grave,

and heaped more flowers upon her. And we stood by, the old white-haired priest and two little peasant lads, the nuns in their long black gowns, and we two who had loved her so deeply, and had never thought that her life would be so short.

And all the time that the Curé was reading the service, a thrush was singing loudly in the yew-tree above.

"Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon her!" said the old man.

And the boys responded softly "Amen!"

One last look at the quiet grave. Ay, rest in peace, our little Primrose! Thou wert frail and easily tempted, but here are two hearts that will always love thee and believe thee pure as the flowers which cover all that is left of thee on earth!

We have lingered awhile in the little cemetery, we have said good-bye to the kind-hearted Sister-

hood, and have promised to visit them again and see the flowers growing over Maggie's grave; and now we are standing at the door of the convent, and Sister Gudule has come across the court-yard to open the outer door. She touches me lightly on the sleeve and shows me two little packets.

"I thought that monsieur and his friend would perhaps like these," she says, diffidently. "She had such beautiful hair, monsieur, and I—I cut these two locks from it this afternoon."

We are outside in the dusky road, with two or three stars glimmering high above our heads and a faint blush in the west where the sun set an hour ago. We do not speak for a long time; our minds are too full of what we have seen. A bird or two still twitter in the hedgerows, and now and then a peasant clatters by in his wooden shoes and bids us good-night. All nature is full of a great benediction.

"Len, I came here with terrible thoughts in

my heart! When I heard she was dead I said to myself that I would seek him out and kill him as he killed her. I vowed that I would hunt him down wherever he might hide, and kill him as cruelly as ever man was killed. I felt that no agony, no pain could punish him sufficiently. I longed for the power of God, so that I might have him placed within my grasp and torture him and laugh at his sufferings and make death a welcome thing to him!

"And then, Len, I went in alone and saw her. Oh, did she ever look so beautiful as she did then? I stood there and spoke softly to her, and she could not answer, and I bent down and kissed the cold lips that seemed still to smile, and I put my hand on her hand—the hand that ought to have been mine. And I knelt down by her and watched her just as if she had been asleep, and somehow the hard, terrible feelings went away from my heart. After all, Len, she—she loved him. Let that save him. Unless he is some devil

let loose to prey on men, his own heart will punish him enough.

"Only, Len, never speak of him to me again!"

We reached the "Three Swans" and went into our room. Going outside to give some orders about our carriage, I saw the landlord, Master Pierrot, in a state of great excitement. Seeing me he began to nod and wink in a mysterious manner, and led the way into a retired corner of the courtyard.

"He has been here, to-night, monsieur!"

"He? Who?"

"Ah, the vile libertine! Ah, the heartless *roué!* Ah, the devil incarnate! Yes, monsieur, the betrayer of that angel whom you have buried to-night. He walked in here but ten minutes after you had gone to the convent, monsieur. 'Where is madame?' he asks. My wife went to him. 'Madame,' says she, 'is in Heaven, villain. They inter her to-night.' Monsieur,

he staggered, and went pale. Ah, my little wife was bitter with him, I promise you. She spared him nothing. She told him all; how the poor lady died, and of your and your friend's arrival, monsieur. And then she told him to leave an honest man's house, monsieur, unless he wished a ducking in the horse-trough. And, oh, monsieur, I fear it was impolitic, but Jacques Magnier, the smith, that great fellow whom you saw to-day, was standing by, and he shouted that we would have no *roués* here, and smote the man across the face, monsieur, a terrible blow, for Jacques can knock down an ox. And I thought he had killed him, for there was much blood, and he fell. But presently he rose, and walked out, and went down the road, and disappeared."

"Say nothing of it to my friend inside, Monsieur Pierrot."

"Monsieur may rely on my discretion. But, oh, if monsieur could but have seen Jacques strike him!"

My story is finished. It is ten years now since Maggie died; and every spring I have gone to Fontrenelle with Tom Christmas, and looked at her grave in the little convent cemetery. There is a dainty slab of marble above it, and her name cut upon the stone, and some words of Scripture. It is always bright with flowers, and Sister Gudule tells us that the thrushes sing in the yew-tree all day long. They are always glad to see us at the little convent, and there are several objects in the tiny chapel which Tom Christmas has sent to them from time to time.

And Tom is still toiling on at Spivey's. Mr. Spivey has prospered more and more, and has now a large establishment, and Tom Christmas is his head clerk, and has a salary which would be a small one in some similar places, but is a large one for Spivey. He is content and happy, and never so much so as when he comes to see me, and sits by my domestic fireside, and plays with my children.

Let me close with three pictures.

The first is a large theatre. The house is packed from floor to ceiling, there is not a seat to be had; for it is the first night of a new play by that popular author and dramatist, Mr. Rupert Tremayne, better known to his large and brilliant circle of friends as Frank Lestrange. Few men have had such a successful career. He is said to earn large sums; he has had a fortune and an estate left him; he is immensely popular with the higher classes of society, and in great favour with Royalty itself. He is a Member of Parliament, and will probably get a peerage; and he has lately married the only daughter of Sir Percival Gresham, the great banker, who is said to have given his child half-a-million as a marriage portion. Such is the gossip of the knowing ones who have flocked together to-night to see his latest success. For it is a success. Every act goes well, every scene and situation tells. The subject is an every-day one. There

is a villain who wrongs a woman, and there is a good young man who suffers for her. And in the play the villain prospers for a time; but Nemesis lights upon him at last, and Vice is punished while Virtue is rewarded. Ah, but is it always so? You, Frank Lestrange, standing before the curtain, with the plaudits of the audience ringing in your ears, know that it is not; for you are not punished yet.

And the second is the great drawing-room at Grandchester Place, where sits Mrs. Dumbury, who is one of the greatest and most influential ladies in England, and feared and flattered by every parson in her husband's diocese. She has been to Court, she has heard the Bishop speak in the Lords, she is angling for the next Archbishopric, and she has forgotten her mother, who is dead, and her brother, who is only a poor, hardworking clerk.

And the third? It is the little back room in the Canonbury Square house, and Tom Christ-

mas sits alone by the fire. His hair is gray, there are many deep lines on his brow; but the eyes are kind, and patient, and true as ever. He has been reading, but he has laid his book aside, and is looking at a portrait which stands in a brass frame on his mantelpiece. And he sighs and looks in the fire again, and perhaps sees the dead girl's face there.

Have courage, Tom Christmas! The *roué* and the Pharisee have had their reward in this present world. Does no voice speak to thee sometimes of a world beyond the veil, where that great love of thine shall be more than satisfied?

THE END.

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